

Ways of Reading

AN ANTHOLOGY FOR WRITERS

TWELFTH EDITION

David Bartholomae

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Anthony Petrosky

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

Stacey Waite

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN



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Acknowledgments

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Preface

Ways of Reading has undergone a significant number of changes over the years, as the needs of educators and students have changed. During that span of time, we have re-experienced a profound need in our society for the cultivation of attentive, inquisitive, and observant readers and writers. We have always valued difficulty; we have always invited students to do some of the most important intellectual and political thinking of their time, and we continue to value difficulty and complexity in these ways. But we also invite teachers and students to think of the twelfth edition of this text as a call to action, as an action itself that takes very seriously the real questions of race, gender, culture, identity, and language that we are called upon to consider with the close attention that reading and writing demands.

There are, indeed, texts in this collection that hold what one might call conceptual power — texts that offer students a weighty historical and political question to think through in the context of their current moment — as is the case with Foucault's notions of social regulation and control, or Tsing's idea of "contaminated diversity," or Griffin's ideas of connection and relation. But there are also texts that ask us to do more — to listen to the stories of those of us in marginalized positions, to consider an experiential story itself as a kind of theoretical perspective, as is the case, for example, with Cruet's "Going Cowboy," Hirsch's "Fragments," or Coates's *Between the World and Me*. These texts invite students to approach difficulty as multidimensional — conceptual, historical, narrative, and practical. And these texts ask students to look closely and carefully at difficult subjects — to consider the ways our ideas about difference have shaped the violence and erasure of our current moment. It is *difficult* to talk with students about these *difficult* subjects. But it is our contention that this difficult work is a necessary part of becoming a writer, in college and beyond, and that this work is urgent.

Ways of Reading is designed for a course in which students are given the opportunity to work on what they read, and to work on it by writing. When we began developing such courses, we realized that the problems our students had when asked to write or talk about what they read were not "reading problems," at least not as these are strictly defined. Our students knew how to move from one page to the next. They could read sentences. They had, obviously, been able to carry out many of the versions of reading required for their education — skimming textbooks, cramming for tests, and strip-mining books for term papers.

Our students, however, often felt powerless in the face of unconventional and complicated texts — the kinds of texts we value. We thought (as many teachers have thought) that if we just, finally, gave them something good to

read — something rich and meaty — they would change forever their ways of thinking about language. It didn't work, of course. The issue is not only *what* students read but what they can learn to *do* with what they read. We learned that the problems our students had lay not in the reading material (it was too hard) or in the students (they were poorly prepared) but in the classroom — in the ways we and they imagined what it meant to work on a text and to transform our understandings of the world *through* a text.

There is no better place to work on reading (both reading texts and reading the world) than in a writing course, and this book is intended to provide occasions for readers examine difficult texts and a difficult world, and to write about that examination. You will find a number of distinctive features in *Ways of Reading*. It contains, for example, selections you don't usually see in a college reader like long, powerful, dense, highly theoretical, and difficult pieces — Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities," John Berger's "Ways of Seeing," Judith Butler's "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," Michel Foucault's "Panopticism," Susan Griffin's "Our Secret," Edward Said's "States," and John Edgar Wideman's "Our Time." Also unusual for a college reader is the gathering of poetry projects here — similarly powerful, difficult pieces by some of the most influential poets of our time — Claudia Rankine, Solmaz Sharif, Layli Long Soldier. These pieces, along with some of the additional new readings in the book — like Jennine Capó Crucet's "Going Cowboy," June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You," and Scaachi Koul's "Hunting Season" — ask their readers to take on difficult subjects, to see our world and our country from a critical angle, to seek out new ideas, perspectives, and forms through which to express them. All crucial habits for active writers *and* active community members.

When we chose the essays, we were looking for "readable" texts — that is, texts that leave some work for a reader to do. We wanted selections that invite students to be active, critical readers, that present powerful readings of common experience, that open up the familiar world and make it puzzling, rich, and problematic. We wanted texts that might help students see the need for further examination, frame new arguments, and discuss the difficulty of their own positionalities in the world. Students will, indeed, find all of this work difficult because this work is difficult for all of us.

Students will sometimes struggle, as we all do, with the unconventional, long, or complex texts in *Ways of Reading*, but the problems often lie in the way they imagine a reader — the role a reader plays, what a reader does, why a reader reads. When, for example, our students were puzzled by what they read, they took this as a sign of failure. ("It doesn't make any sense," they would say, as though the sense was supposed to be waiting on the page, ready for them the first time they read through.) And our students were haunted by the thought that they couldn't remember everything they had read (as though one could store all of Judith Butler's "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" in memory); or if they did remember bits and pieces, they felt that the fragmented text they possessed was evidence that they could not do what they were supposed to do. Our students were confronting the experience of reading, in other words, but they were taking the problems of reading — problems all readers

face — and concluding that there was nothing for them to do but give up. The problem of reading echoes the problem of our times — the idea that when something becomes difficult to understand or see, there is nothing for us to do but give up. This textbook invites all of us — teachers, students, readers, writers — to refuse the compulsion to give up by looking away from the difficult subjects or by refusing that which we don't, at first, understand.

These are the lessons our students need to learn, and this is why a course in reading is also a course in writing. Our students need to learn that there is something they can do once they have first read through a complicated text; successful reading is not just a matter of "getting" a text the first time. In a very real sense, you can't begin to feel the power a reader has until you realize the problems, until you realize that no one "gets" Butler or Long Soldier or Tsing all at once. You work on what you read, and then what you have at the end is something that is yours, something you made. And this is what the teaching apparatus in *Ways of Reading* is designed to do. In a sense, it says to students, "OK, let's get to work on these texts; let's see what you can make of them."

This, then, is another distinctive feature you will find in *Ways of Reading*: reading and writing assignments designed to give students access to the readings. After each selection, for example, you will find "Questions for a Second Reading." We wanted to acknowledge that rereading is a natural way of carrying out the work of a reader, just as rewriting is a natural way of completing the work of a writer. It is not something done out of despair or as a punishment for not getting things right the first time. The questions we have written highlight what we see as central textual or interpretive problems. These questions might serve as preparations for class discussion or ways of directing students' work in journals. Whatever the case, they both honor and direct the work of rereading.

Each selection is also followed by two sets of writing assignments, "Assignments for Writing" and "Making Connections." The first set directs students back into the work they have just read. While the assignments vary, there are some basic principles behind them. They ask students to work on the essay by focusing on difficult or problematic moments in the text; they ask students to work on the author's examples, extending and testing his or her methods of analysis; or they ask students to apply the method of the essay (its way of seeing and understanding the world) to settings or experiences of their own. The last assignments, "Making Connections," invite students to read one essay in the context of another, to see, for example, if Mary Louise Pratt's account of the "literate arts of the contact zone" can be used to frame a reading of Gloria Anzaldúa's prose or Tsing's concepts of contamination. In a sense, then, the essays are offered as models, but not as "prose models" in the strictest sense. What they model is a way of seeing or reading the world, of both imagining problems and imagining methods to make those problems available to a writer.

At the end of the book, we have included several assignment sequences. A single sequence provides structure for an entire course. (There are a number of additional sequences included in the Instructor's Manual.) The sequences include more than one essay in the anthology and require a series of separate drafts and

revisions. Alternative essays and assignments are included with the sequences. Readers seldom read single essays in isolation, as though one could be “finished” with Ta-Nehisi Coates after a week or two. Rather, they read with a purpose — with a project in mind or a problem to solve. The assignment sequences are designed to give students a feel for the rhythm and texture of an extended intellectual project. They offer, that is, one more way of reading and writing. And, with the luxury of time available for self-reflection, students can look back on what they have done, not only to revise what they know, but also to take stock and comment on the value and direction of their work.

Because of their diversity, it is difficult to summarize the assignment sequences. Perhaps the best way to see what we have done is to turn to the back of the book and look at them. They are meant not only to frame a project for students but to leave open possibilities for new directions. You should feel free to add or drop readings, to mix sequences, and to revise the assignments to fit your course and your schedule.

You will also notice that there are few “glosses” appended to the essays. We have not added many editors’ notes to define difficult words or to identify names or allusions to other authors or artists. We’ve omitted them because their presence suggests something we feel is false about reading. They suggest that good readers know all the words or pick up all the allusions or recognize every name that is mentioned. This is not true. Good readers do what they can and try their best to fill in the blanks; they ignore seemingly unimportant references and look up the important ones. There is no reason for students to feel they lack the knowledge necessary to complete a reading of these texts. We have translated some likely unfamiliar phrases, but we have kept the selections as clean and open as possible.

We have been asked on several occasions whether the readings aren’t finally just too hard for students. The answer is no. Students will have to work on the selections, but that is the point of the course and the reason, as we said before, why a reading course is also a course in writing. College students want to believe that they can strike out on their own, make their mark, do something they have never done before. They want to *be* experts, not just hear from them. This is the great pleasure, as well as the great challenge, of undergraduate instruction. It is not hard to convince students they ought to be able to speak alongside of (or even speak back to) Judith Butler or Edward Said. And, if a teacher is patient and forgiving — willing, that is, to let a student work out a reading of Butler or Tsing, willing to keep from saying, “No, that’s not it,” and filling the silence with the “right” reading — then students can, with care and assistance, learn to speak for themselves. It takes a certain kind of classroom, to be sure. A teacher who teaches this book will have to be comfortable turning the essays over to the students, even with the knowledge that they will not do immediately on their own what a “professional” could do — at least not completely, or with the same grace and authority.

In our own teaching, we have learned that we do not have to be experts on every figure or every area of inquiry represented in this book. We can have intelligent, responsible conversations about Appiah’s “Racial Identities” without

being experts on Appiah's work or all current work on race and identity. We needed to prepare ourselves to engage and direct students as readers, but we did not have to prepare ourselves to lecture on Foucault or Butler on poststructuralism and gender theory. The classes we have been teaching, and they have been some of the most exciting we have ever taught, have been classes where students — together and with their instructors — work on what these essays might mean.

NEW TO THE TWELFTH EDITION

More than a third of the selections in the twelfth edition of *Ways of Reading* are new. Our principle of selection remains the same — we were looking for “readable” texts, pieces that instructors and students would find challenging and compelling, pieces that offer powerful readings of ordinary experiences, pieces worth extended work.

There are new selections by Jeff Chang, Roxane Gay, June Jordan, Layli Long Soldier, Solmaz Sharif, and Anna Tsing, among others. In this edition, in addition to chapter-length selections, we explored some shorter texts that take on some complex subject matter that students can examine closely, and we have brought in poetic selections that ask students to engage with forms outside of the traditional essay. In our contemporary moment, we thought it imperative to bring new voices into this edition that might lead students to think more deeply about language, identity, and politics. These new selections come from authors working in a variety of areas such as anthropology, memoir, critical theory, and creative writing. In these new texts, students will, indeed, revisit many of the critical questions that have been at the heart of *Ways of Reading* since its first edition — questions of being, questions of power, questions of education, questions of interpretation and composition. We believe it is crucial — perhaps now more than ever — for students to come to think of themselves as generative intellectuals, as writers who have the agency and ability to intervene in the public rhetorics that construct our world. We have developed three new assignment sequences that ask students to confront and question both the world itself and the formal act of writing. The sequences “Listening in Our Present” and “Examinations of Race and Racism” are important to this book, and we believe these sequences can help students do the work of reading, writing, and critical engagement in a difficult age. Additionally, our sequence “Beyond the Essay,” invites students to engage in assignments that are positioned as alternatives to the conventional intellectual essay; the assignments in the sequences all invite students to take on a formally innovative project that might not be considered an “essay” at all. We have revised the existing sequences, some to incorporate the new selections, others because, after teaching them again, we thought about them differently. In addition to sequences focusing on academic writing, we have continued to offer sequences focusing on autobiographical writing and the personal essay. While there have always been assignments in *Ways of Reading* that ask students to use their experience as subject matter, these assignments invite students to look critically and historically at the autobiographical genre and position reading and thinking as

part of one's "personal" experience. The texts by writers like Gloria Bird, Joy Castro, and Jennine Capó Crucet, for example, have much to offer students in terms of how they might study and imitate this personal and intellectual work. We remain convinced that this kind of imitative work helps students think about sentences, rhetorical choices, and style in dynamic and useful ways. We continue to focus attention on prose models that challenge conventional forms and on writers who complicate the usual ways of thinking about and representing knowledge and experience. There are several assignment sequences that ask students to write as though they too could participate in such revisionary work.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With our colleagues, we have taught most of the selections in this book, including the new ones. Several of us worked together to prepare the assignment sequences; most of these, too, have been tested in class. As we have traveled around giving talks, we've met many people who have used *Ways of Reading*. We have been delighted to hear them speak about how it has served their teaching, and we have learned much from their advice and example. It is an unusual and exciting experience to see our course turned into a text, to see our work read, critiqued, revised, and expanded. We have many people to thank. The list that follows can't begin to name all those to whom we owe a debt. And it can't begin to express our gratitude.

We owe much to the friendship and wisdom of our colleagues and students at both the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. It is an honor and a pleasure to work together with such colleagues and students; we have learned much from their example, their critiques, and their suggestions. We owe much to current and former graduate students at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, especially Gina Keplinger, who has helped with writing assignments and doing research for this particular edition. We wish to thank old friends and colleagues with whom we have worked for a very long time: Jean Ferguson Carr, Steve Carr, Nick Coles, Jean Grace, Paul Kameen, Geeta Kothari, Jennifer Lee, Beth Matway, and Brenda Whitney. Thanks to all who have followed our work with interest and offered their support and criticism. We are grateful for the notes, letters, and student papers.

We were fortunate to have a number of outstanding reviewers on the project: Kevin Allton, University of Southern Indiana; David Bockoven, Lane Community College; Jean Ferguson Carr, University of Pittsburgh; Catherine Carter, Lake Erie College; Douglas Currier, State University of New York at Plattsburgh; Cynthia Elliot, Clovis Community College; Jacqueline Gray, St. Charles County Community College; Jeff Gundy, Bluffton University; Uma Krishnan, Kent State University; John Levine, University of California, Berkeley; Daniel Libertz, University of Pittsburgh; Noreen O'Connor, King's College; Tricia Ornelas, San Diego City College; Gary Pandolfi, Quinnipiac University; Glenda Pritchett, Quinnipiac University; Michael Quinn, Framingham State University; Catherine Sayre, Grossmont College; Nathaniel Street, Mount Saint Vincent University; Christopher Syrnyk, Oregon Institute of Technology; Andrew Winckles, Adrian College.

Chuck Christensen and Joan Feinberg, the founders of Bedford/St. Martin's, helped shape this project from its very beginning. They remain fine and thoughtful friends as well as fine and thoughtful editors. We thank Edwin Hill, Leasa Burton, and John Sullivan for their continued guidance. We owe special thanks to Evelyn Denham, our editor, who helped to shape this new edition, and to William Hwang, who assisted with many details and also with the Instructor's Manual. Arthur Johnson and Carolyn Arcabascio handled permissions under the able guidance of Kalina Ingham and Angie Boehler. Harold Chester expertly guided the manuscript through production. Julie Bates Dock was an excellent copy editor, sensitive to the quirks of our prose and attentive to detail.

And, finally, we are grateful to Joyce, to Vivian and Brie, and to Jesse, Dan, Kate, Matthew, and Ben, for their love and support.

ABOUT THE COVER

The work of Peter Sacks (*Road To The Interior 5*) appears on the cover of this edition. It is a quite fitting image, and Sacks a fitting artist, for us to feature. Sacks is a scholar, a poet, and a visual artist born in South Africa. In *The New York Times*, Daphne Merkin says of Sacks that he is "absorbed by the potential of words and images to not only address the ravages of history but to offer consolation." Because our book also works at the intersections of language, image, and history — and because Sacks' work suggests the complex act of writing is technological, aesthetic, academic, historical, and poetic — we feel his both this image, and his work more broadly, offers a lens through which to understand the texts and images we have gathered and the nuanced cultural work *Ways of Reading* invites students to take up in their own writing.

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"So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity — I am my language. Until I

can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself."

[FROM *Borderlands/La Frontera*]

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"The observation that there is no common American national culture will come as a surprise to many: observations about American culture, taken as a whole, are common. It is, for example, held to be individualist, litigious, racially obsessed. I think each of these claims is actually true, because what I mean when I say there is no common culture of the United States is not what is denied by someone who says that there is an American culture."

[FROM *Color Conscious*]

ALISON BECHDEL, THE ORDINARY DEVOTED MOTHER 69

"Like my mother, I keep a log of the events of daily external life, but unlike her, I also record a great deal of information about my internal life. Although I'm often confused about precisely where the demarcation lies."

[FROM *Are You My Mother?*]

RUTH BEHAR, THE VULNERABLE OBSERVER 109

"To assert that one is a 'white middle-class woman' or a 'black gay man' or a 'working-class Latina' within one's study of Shakespeare or Santería is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study. That doesn't require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied."

[FROM *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*]

JOHN BERGER, WAYS OF SEEING 138

"What the modern means of reproduction have done is to destroy the authority of art and to remove it — or, rather, to remove its images which they reproduce — from any preserve. For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free. They surround us in the same way as a language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life over which they no longer, in themselves, have power."

[FROM *Ways of Seeing*]

ON REMBRANDT'S WOMAN IN BED 157

"In the painting . . . there is a complicity between the woman and the painter."

ON CARAVAGGIO'S *THE CALLING OF ST. MATTHEW* 159

"And the promise is not in what will flare against it, but in the darkness itself."

[SELECTIONS FROM *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*]

GLORIA BIRD, AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS SPECTACLE: AN ACT OF LIBERATION OR THE ILLUSION OF LIBERATION? 168

"What have not been adequately addressed are the many differences between the People and ourselves, meaning Native writers, and these *are* issues of class. I have been educated in a system that is designed to deny us on many levels; but as a participant in that system, which has earned me a 'site of privilege' from which to speak, however marginally, what have I become? And if the answer to that question remains continually out of reach, it does not keep me from asking of myself, because I *say* as I please, is this an act of liberation or the illusion of liberation?"

[FIRST APPEARED IN *Here First: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers*]

JUDITH BUTLER, BESIDE ONESELF: ON THE LIMITS OF SEXUAL AUTONOMY 182

"To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor."

[FROM *Undoing Gender*]

JOY CASTRO, HUNGRY 207

"I have not kept my place. Like my mother and grandmother, I chose the earth — but the real earth, complicated and torn, not a post-Armageddon fantasy purveyed by a global religious organization with its own political and financial ends. I chose education, although, growing up, I knew no one who had graduated from college, aside from my schoolteachers and, briefly, my father's lawyer."

ON BECOMING EDUCATED 210

"At the time, I didn't realize that these small incidents were negotiations of power, contests over whose perspectives mattered and whose voices would be permitted and welcomed at the table."

[SELECTIONS FROM *Island of Bones*]

JEFF CHANG, IS DIVERSITY FOR WHITE PEOPLE? 221

"And so diversity remains a premonition of racial apocalypse; a photo op and dash; a commodity conveying value; a marker of moral credibility,

even fitness in the Darwinian sense; a term of corporate management; an offering of racial innocence and absolution; a refusal of protection to historically negated communities of color; a performance for entertainment or edification or exploitation; another boring lesson in tolerance and civility; a mark of Otherness."

[FROM *We Gon' Be Alright*]

TA-NEHISI COATES, BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME 242

"Americans believe in the reality of 'race' as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism — the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them — inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men."

[FROM *Between the World and Me*]

JENNINE CAPÓ CRUCET, GOING COWBOY 258

"The rancher's misinformed grievance is one I hear often because, as a light-skinned Latina, I often accidentally trespass into moments that are essentially displays of white power intended only for other whites. It wasn't until my first year of college, when I read Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* in a course, that I first recognized this trespassing as an act in which I had sometimes found myself but didn't yet know how to define: white people who misread me as also white sometimes display the kind of pervasive racism usually reserved for white-only spaces."

[FROM *My Time Among the Whites*]

W. E. B. DU BOIS, OF THE TRAINING OF BLACK MEN 273

"But when we have vaguely said that Education will set this tangle straight, what have we uttered but a truism? Training for life teaches living; but what training for the profitable living together of black men and white?"

[FROM *The Souls of Black Folk*]

MICHEL FOUCAULT, PANOPTICISM 291

"Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of force and bodies."

[FROM *Discipline and Punish*]

ATUL GAWANDE, SLOW IDEAS 325

"In our era of electronic communications, we've come to expect that important innovations will spread quickly. Plenty do: think of in-vitro fertilization, genomics, and communications technologies themselves. But there's an equally long list of vital innovations that have failed to catch on. The puzzle is why."

[FIRST APPEARED IN *The New Yorker*]

ROXANE GAY, HOW TO BE FRIENDS WITH ANOTHER WOMAN 343

"Abandon the cultural myth that all female friendships must be bitchy, toxic, or competitive. This myth is like heels and purses — pretty but designed to SLOW women down."

[FROM *Bad Feminist*]

SUSAN GRIFFIN, OUR SECRET 351

"The nightmare images of the German child-rearing practices that one discovers . . . call to mind the catastrophic events of recent German history. I first encountered this pedagogy in the writing of Alice Miller. At one time a psychoanalyst, she was haunted by the question, *What could make a person conceive the plan of gassing millions of human beings to death?* In her work, she traces the origins of this violence to childhood. Of course there cannot be one answer to such a monumental riddle, nor does any event in history have a single cause. Rather a field exists. . . ."

[FROM *A Chorus of Stones*]

AUBREY HIRSCH, FRAGMENTS 387

"Your prize for all this effort is a small thing, but you cherish it. It is the astonishment on your harasser's face. Sometimes he even mutters a flimsy 'Sorry' before he hurries away from you. He doesn't want a conversation. He's not shouting at you as a method of engagement; he's just testing something out. He needs to fumble around for his power in the dark, like a totem he carries in his pocket. He wants to make sure it's still there."

[FROM *Not That Bad*]

JUNE JORDAN, NOBODY MEAN MORE TO ME THAN YOU AND THE FUTURE LIFE OF WILLIE JORDAN 399

"How best to serve the memory of Reggie Jordan? Should we use the language of the killer — Standard English — in order to make our ideas acceptable to those controlling the killers? But wouldn't what we had to say be rejected, summarily, if we said it in our own language, the language of the victim, Reggie Jordan? But if we sought to express ourselves by abandoning our language wouldn't that mean our suicide on top of Reggie's murder? But if we expressed ourselves in our own language wouldn't that be suicidal to the wish to communicate with those who,

evidently, did not give a damn about us/Reggie/police violence in the Black community?"

[FROM *On Call: Political Essays*]

SCAACHI KOUL, HUNTING SEASON 417

"Surveillance feeds into rape culture more than drinking ever could. It's the part of male entitlement that makes them believe they're owed something if they pay enough attention to you, monitor how you're behaving to see if you seem loose and friendly enough to accommodate a conversation with a man you've never met. He's not a rapist. No, he's just offering to buy you a beer, and a shot, and a beer, and another beer, he just wants you to have a really good time. He wants you to lose the language of being able to consent."

[FROM *One Day We'll All Be Dead and None of This Will Matter*]

LAYLI LONG SOLDIER, 38 427

"The Dakota 38 refers to thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders from President Abraham Lincoln.

To date, this is the largest "legal" mass execution in US history.

The hanging took place on December 26, 1862 — the day after Christmas.

This was the *same week* that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation."

[FROM *Whereas*]

WALKER PERCY, THE LOSS OF THE CREATURE 436

"When a caste system becomes absolute, envy disappears. Yet the caste of layman-expert is not the fault of the expert. It is due altogether to the eager surrender of sovereignty by the layman so that he may take up the role not of the person but of the consumer."

[FROM *The Message in the Bottle*]

MARY LOUISE PRATT, ARTS OF THE CONTACT ZONE 454

"I use this term [*contact zone*] to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their after-maths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. Eventually I will use the term to reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today."

[FIRST APPEARED IN *Profession* 91]

JENNY PRICE, THIRTEEN WAYS OF SEEING NATURE IN L.A. 475

"We use nature and tell stories about it to live and explain our lives. To use nature is to be human: that's a pretty fair working condition. To tell

stories is to be a human explaining how things work. The stories that any people tell about nature are some the most basic stories they tell. *Is there nature in L.A.?* The fact that the major nature story we tell in L.A., as in all cities, is that there is no nature here does not make this tale any less basic, powerful, or telling."

[FROM *Land of Sunshine*]

CLAUDIA RANKINE, CITIZEN 501

"Sitting there staring at the closed garage door you are reminded that a friend once told you there exists the medical term — John Henryism — for people exposed to stresses stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure. Sherman James, the researcher who came up with the term, claimed the physiological costs were high. You hope by sitting in silence you are bucking the trend."

[FROM *Citizen*]

EDWARD SAID, STATES 523

"Exile is a series of portraits without names, without contexts. Images that are largely unexplained, nameless, mute. I look at them without precise anecdotal knowledge, but their realistic exactness nevertheless makes a deeper impression than mere information. I cannot reach the actual people who were photographed, except through a European photographer who saw them for me."

[FROM *After the Last Sky*]

SOLMAZ SHARIF, LOOK 565

"Whereas *Well, if I were from your culture, living in this country,*

said the man outside the 2004 Republican National

Convention, *I would put up with that for this country;*

Whereas I felt the need to clarify: *You would put up with*

TORTURE, *you mean* and he proclaimed: *Yes;*"

[FROM *Look*]

ANNA TSING, THE MUSHROOM AT THE END OF THE WORLD 581

"Collaboration is work across difference, yet this is not the innocent diversity of self-contained evolutionary tracks. The evolution of our "selves" is already polluted by histories of encounter; we are mixed up with others before we even begin any new collaboration. Worse yet, we are mixed up in the projects that do us the most harm. The diversity that allows us to enter collaborations emerges from histories of extermination, imperialism, and all the rest. Contamination makes diversity."

[FROM *The Mushroom at the End of the World*]

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN, OUR TIME 603

"The hardest habit to break, since it was the habit of a lifetime, would be listening to myself listen to him. That habit would destroy any chance of seeing my brother on his terms; and seeing him in his terms, learning his terms, seemed the whole point of learning his story. However numerous and comforting the similarities, we were different. The world had seized on the difference, allowed me room to thrive, while he'd been forced into a cage. Why did it work out that way? What was the nature of the difference? Why did it haunt me? Temporarily at least, to answer these questions, I had to root my fiction-writing self out of our exchanges. I had to teach myself to listen."

[FROM *Brothers and Keepers*]

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SAID *States*

BUTLER *Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy*

GRIFFIN *Our Secret*

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BEHAR *The Vulnerable Observer*

GAY *How to be Friends with Another Woman*

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2. *Identity and Representation* SAID 651

3. *The Concept of Human* BUTLER 651

4. *The Politics of Dehumanization* BUTLER, SAID 652

5. *Interconnectedness and Identity* GRIFFIN 653

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CASTRO *Hungry and On Becoming Educated*

PRATT *Arts of the Contact Zone*

GAWANDE *Slow Ideas*

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GRIFFIN *Our Secret*

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 SAID *States*

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 CRUCET *Going Cowboy*

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 BECHDEL *The Ordinary Devoted Mother*
 CASTRO *Hungry and On Becoming Educated*
 PRICE *Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.*

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Introduction: Ways of Reading

ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTY

This book has, at its heart, an essential basic principle: facing difficulty is perhaps the most important action a student—or even just a person—can take in order to truly learn, think, and write in innovative and exploratory ways. The gathering of texts and assignments in this book invites you into difficult territory. And we think of “difficulty” in a variety of ways. There is the difficulty of reading dense or highly specialized academic writing and responding to it—something students will have to do in college quite frequently. With this difficulty comes the challenge of comprehension *and* analysis, the challenge of reading *and* interpreting a complicated text, and the challenge of knowing where to begin in your writing as you respond. Facing these challenges is imperative in learning to think, read, and write in new ways.

Many of the texts we have gathered here disrupt conventional ideas about form. Some texts in the collection will seem like traditional “essays,” but most of the texts will expand and stretch our ideas about the particular forms that argument and inquiry can take. We have included here visual and graphic pieces, poetry, genre-resisting texts, list-driven compositions, and personal narratives. It can be difficult, at first, when a text subverts your expectations about what form an intellectual, political, or cultural argument can take. All the writers in this collection are here because we believe their writing encourages us to think both about content (the subject at hand in their texts) and about form (how the writer goes about tackling this subject). As a writer, you too will do the difficult work of thinking about the relationship between form and content. And the essays here

are part of the challenge of being an innovative reader and writer — one who can think outside the box of conventional writing norms.

But there is another kind of difficulty teachers and students alike will face in encountering the readings here. This difficulty stems from coming into contact with perspectives and descriptions of the world that you find difficult to hear. Perhaps because your own identity and perspective is either very distant or very close to the ones taken up in a given reading. Or perhaps because it is often difficult to acknowledge and take account of what is urgently and gravely wrong in our current cultural and political moment. The texts here challenge us to *be* writers — which means, in a fundamental sense, to be willing to look carefully, closely, and unrelentingly both at the world as you imagine it to be and at the world as it is for those who are *not* you. In this spirit, we invite you to develop and nurture new ways of reading for yourself, new ways of listening when someone else (for example, an author of one of the texts in this book) is speaking. We believe this will not only make you a better reader and writer, but it will also make you a more attentive and precise thinker in your life at large — both your academic life *and* your personal/social/professional life as you move through and beyond your college experience.

MAKING A MARK

Reading involves a fair measure of push and shove. You make your mark on a text, and it makes its mark on you (of course, you have to *allow* the reading to make a mark on you, to open you to new perspectives). But reading is not simply a matter of hanging back and waiting for a piece, or its author, to tell you what the writing has to say. In fact, one of the difficult things about reading is that the pages before you will begin to speak only when you begin to speak (and write) — doing their work, taking on their methods, continuing their projects — for yourself, following your own agenda.

This is an unusual way to talk about reading, we know. We have not mentioned finding information or locating an author's purpose or identifying main ideas, useful though these skills are, because the purpose of our book is to offer you occasions to imagine other ways of reading. We think of reading as a social interaction. We need only look to the complex social interactions we engage in every day to imagine the multiple possibilities for reading — sometimes peaceful and polite, sometimes contentious, sometimes hesitant and difficult. If you imagine your reading as a particular kind of social interaction, then you might be able to imagine, for example, a text you might feel shy around, perhaps because it is behaving in a way you find unusual or difficult. You might imagine a text that encourages you, like a friend might — or a text that provokes you like an older sibling. Thinking about reading this way means, of course, that you have to do your part of the interaction. Engaging with reading in these ways is an essential part of engaging with reading *as a writer*.

We'd like you to imagine that when you read the works we've collected here, somebody is saying something to you, and we'd like you to imagine that you are in a position to speak back, to say something of your own in turn. In other words, we are not presenting our book as a miniature library (a place to find information),

and we do not think of you, the reader, as a paper-writer (a person looking for information to summarize or report).

When you read, you hear an author's voice as you move along; you believe a person with something to say is talking to you. You pay attention (even when you don't completely understand what is being said) and you attempt to relate what the author says to what you already know or expect to hear or learn, trusting that it will all make sense in the end. Even if you don't quite grasp everything you are reading at every moment (and you won't), and even if you don't remember everything you've read (no reader does—at least not in long, complex pieces), you begin to see the outlines of the author's project, the patterns and rhythms of that particular way of seeing and interpreting the world.

When you stop to talk or write about what you've read, the author goes silent; you take over—it is your turn to write, to begin responding to what the author said. At that point, this author and his or her text become something you construct out of what you remember or what you notice as you go back through the text a second time, working from passages or examples, but filtering them through your own predisposition to see or read in particular ways.

Reading, in other words, can be the occasion for you to put things together, to notice this idea or theme rather than that one, to follow a writer's announced or secret ends while simultaneously following your own, to articulate or acknowledge what you think the set of questions an author raises invites you to ask. When this happens, when you forge a reading of a text, you make your mark on it, casting it in your terms. But the story makes its mark on you as well, teaching you not only about a subject but also about a way of seeing and understanding a subject. The text provides the opportunity for you to see through someone else's powerful language, to imagine your own familiar settings through the images, metaphors, and ideas of others. An active reader tries, in her first reading, to understand the way of reading enacted by an author. Understanding the angle from which an author sees and reads the world helps an active reader respond more powerfully as a writer.

Readers learn to put things together by writing. This is not something you can do, at least not to any degree, while you are reading. It requires that you work on what you have read, and this work best takes shape when you sit down to write. We will have more to say about this kind of thinking in a later section of the introduction, but for now let us say that writing gives you a way of going to work on the text you have read. To write about a text, you go back to what you have read to find phrases or passages that define what for you are the key moments, those that help you interpret sections that seem difficult or troublesome or mysterious. If you are writing an essay of your own, the work that you are doing gives a purpose and a structure to that rereading.

Writing also, however, gives you a way of going back to work on the text of your own reading. It allows you to be self-critical and self-reflexive. You can revise not just to make your essay neat or tight or tidy but to see what kind of reader you have been, to examine the patterns and consequences in the choices you

**READERS LEARN TO PUT
THINGS TOGETHER BY WRITING.**

have made. Revision, in other words, gives you the chance to work on your essay, but it also gives you an opportunity to work on your reading—to qualify or extend or question your interpretation of a particular text.

We can describe this process of “re-vision,” or re-seeing, fairly simply. You should not expect to read any of the texts once and completely understand it or know what you want to say. You will work out what you have to say while you write. And once you have constructed a reading—once you have completed a draft of your essay, in other words—you can step back, see what you have done, and go back to work on it. Through this activity—writing and rewriting—we have seen our students become active and critical readers.

Not everything a reader reads is worth that kind of effort. The pieces we have chosen for this book all provide, we feel, powerful ways of seeing (or framing) our common experience. The selections cannot be quickly summarized. They are striking, surprising, sometimes troubling in how they challenge common ways of seeing the world. Some of them have captured and altered the way our culture sees and understands daily experience. These texts have changed the ways people think and write. In fact, every selection in the book is one that has given us, our students, and our colleagues that dramatic experience, almost like a discovery, when we suddenly saw things as we had never seen them before and, as a consequence, we had to work hard to understand what had happened and how our thinking had changed.

If we recall, for example, the first time we read Ta-Nehisi Coates or Scaachi Koul we know that they have radically shaped our thinking. We carry these essays with us in our minds, mulling over them, working through them, hearing Koul and Coates in sentences we write or read. We introduce the texts in classes we teach whenever we can; we are surprised, reading them for the third or fourth time, to find things we didn’t see before. It’s not that we failed to “get” these texts the first time around. In fact, we’re not sure we have captured them yet, at least not in any final sense, and we disagree in basic ways about what Koul and Coates are saying, about what questions are central to their inquiry, or about how these texts might best be used. Texts like these are not the sort that you can “get” like a loaf of bread at the store. We’re each convinced that the texts are ours in that we know best what’s going on in them, and yet we have also become theirs because of the ways they have come to influence our seeing, talking, reading, and writing. This power of influence is something we welcome, yet it is also something we resist.

Our experience with these texts is a remarkable one and certainly hard to provide for others, but the challenges and surprises are reasons we read in the first place—we hope to be taken and changed in just these ways. Or, to be more accurate, it is why we read outside the daily requirements to keep up with the news or conduct our business. And it is why we bring reading into our writing courses.

WAYS OF READING

Before explaining how we organized this book, we would like to say more about the purpose and place of the kind of active, labor-intensive reading we’ve been referring to.

Readers face many kinds of experiences, and certain texts are written with specific situations in mind and invite specific ways of reading. Some texts, for instance, serve very practical purposes—they give directions or information. Others, like the short descriptive essays often used in English textbooks and anthologies, celebrate common and conventional ways of thinking and ask primarily to be admired. These texts seem self-contained; they announce their own meanings with little effort and ask little from the reader, making it clear how they want to be read and what they have to say. They ask only for a nod of the head or for the reader to take notes and give a sigh of admiration (“yes, that was very well said”). They are clear and direct. It is as though the authors could anticipate all the questions their essays might raise and solve all the problems a reader might imagine. There is not much work for a reader to do, in other words, except perhaps to take notes and, in the case of textbooks, to work step-by-step, trying to remember as much as possible. These readings mostly require us to behave ourselves, to accept what they offer and recall it later.

This is how assigned readings are often presented in university classrooms. Introductory textbooks (in biology or business, for instance) are good examples of books that ask to be read dutifully and passively. In these texts the writers are experts, and your job, as novice, is to digest what they have to say. And, perhaps appropriately at times, the task set before you is to summarize—so you can speak again to what the author said, so you can better remember what you read. Essay tests are an example of the writing tasks that often follow this kind of reading. You might, for instance, study the human nervous system through textbook readings and lectures and then be asked to write a summary of what you know from both sources. Or a teacher might ask you during a class discussion to paraphrase a paragraph from a textbook describing chemical cell communication to see if you understand what you’ve read.

Another typical classroom form of reading is reading for main ideas. With this kind of reading you are expected to figure out what most people (or most people within a certain specialized group of readers) would take as the main idea of a selection. There are good reasons to read for main ideas. For one, it is a way to learn how to imagine and anticipate the values and habits of a particular group—test-makers or, if you’re studying business, Keynesian economists, perhaps. If you are studying business, to continue this example, you must learn to notice what Keynesian economists notice—for instance, when they analyze the problems of growing government debt—to share key terms, to know the theoretical positions they take, and to adopt for yourself their common examples and interpretations, their jargon, and their established findings.

There is certainly nothing wrong with reading for information or reading to learn what experts have to say about their fields of inquiry. These are not, however, the only ways to read, although they are the ones most often taught. Perhaps because we think of ourselves as writing teachers, we are concerned with presenting other ways of reading in the college and university curriculum.

A danger arises in assuming that reading is only a search for information or main ideas. There are ways of thinking through problems and working with written texts that are essential to our academic, professional, and personal lives, but that are not represented by summary and paraphrase or by note-taking and essay exams.

Student readers, for example, can take responsibility for determining the meaning of the text. They can work as though they were doing something other than finding ideas already there on the page, and they can be guided by their own impressions or questions as they read. We are not, now, talking about finding hidden meanings. If such things as hidden meanings can be said to exist, they are hidden by readers' habits and prejudices (by readers' assumptions that what they read should tell them what they already know) or by readers' passivity (by their unwillingness to take the responsibility to say what they notice or to pose their own questions).

Reading to locate meaning in the text places a premium on memory, yet an active reader is not necessarily a person with a good memory. This point may seem minor, but we have seen too many students haunted because they could not remember everything they read or retain a complete text in their minds. A reader could set herself the task of remembering as much as she could from Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature," a text filled with stories about tourists at the Grand Canyon and students in a biology class, but a reader could also do other things with that text; a reader might figure out, for example, how students and tourists might be said to have a common problem seeing what they want to see. Students who read Percy's text as a memory test end up worrying about bits and pieces (bits and pieces they could go back and find, if they had to) and turn their attention away from the more pressing problem of how to make sense of a difficult and often ambiguous text.

A reader who needs to have access to something in the text can use simple memory aids. A reader can go back and scan, for one thing, to find passages or examples that might be worth reconsidering. Or a reader can construct a personal index, making marks in the margin or underlining passages that seem interesting or mysterious or difficult. A mark is a way of saying, "This is something I might want to work on later." If you mark the selections in this book as you read them, you will give yourself a working record of what, at the first moment of reading, you felt might be worth a second reading.

If Percy's text presents problems for a reader, they are problems of a different order from summary and recall. The text is not the sort that tells you what it says. You would have difficulty finding one sentence that sums up or announces, in a loud and clear voice, what Percy is talking about. In fact, Percy's text is challenging reading in part because it does not have a single easily identifiable main idea. A reader could infer that it has several points to make, none of which can be said easily, and some of which, perhaps, are contradictory. To search for information, or to ignore the rough edges in search of a single, paraphrasable idea, is to divert attention from the task at hand, which is not to remember what Percy says, but to speak about the text and what it means to you, the reader. In this sense, the Percy piece is not the sum of its individual parts; it is, more accurately, what its readers make of it.

A reader could go to an expert on Percy to solve the problem of what to make of the text—perhaps to a teacher, perhaps to the Internet or to a book in the library. And if the reader pays attention, she might remember what the expert said, or she could take notes. But in doing either, the reader only rehearses the thoughts of others, abandoning the responsibility to make the text meaningful,

to become invested in the text for her own purposes. There are ways of reading, in other words, in which Percy's text "The Loss of the Creature" is not what it means to the experts but what it means to you as a reader willing to take the chance to construct a reading. You can be the authority on Percy; you don't have to turn to others. The meaning of the text, then, is something you develop as you go along, something for which you must take final responsibility. The meaning is forged from reading the text, to be sure, but it is determined by what you *do* with the essay, by the connections you can make and your explanation of why those connections are important. This version of Percy's text will finally be yours; it will not be exactly what Percy said. (Only his words in the order he wrote them would say exactly what he said.) You will choose the path to take through his text.

You'll notice (and we will discuss later) that we offer some "Questions for a Second Reading" once you've read through a piece one time. But what about that *first* reading, that first time you read a challenging and multidimensional piece of writing like the ones you find here? There are many ways to engage with a text as you read it for the first time. It's important to have a way to write on the text itself—not just to highlight sections you find interesting, troubling, or confusing (though you might do that, too), but to keep notes to yourself in the margins, perhaps writing questions that come up for you as you read, or writing down key words that will help you remember why you marked that particular place. Sometimes, with particularly difficult readings, we ask students to mark words, names, or phrases that they think would be useful hyperlinks—moments in the text where you wish you could click on the word or phrase in order to find out more. If you try this on your first read-through, you might learn something important; you might learn what you don't yet know about the text. Often, being an engaged reader means paying attention both to what is familiar and to what is unfamiliar about what you are reading.

If a text is not the sum of its parts but something you as a reader create by putting together those parts that seem to matter to you, then the way to begin, once you have read a selection in this collection, is by reviewing what you recall, by going back to those places that stick in your memory—or, perhaps, to those sections you marked with checks or notes in the margins. You can even return to those moments in which you *didn't* know exactly where the text was trying to lead you.

You begin by seeing what you can make of these memories and notes. You should realize that with texts as complex as those we've included in this book, you will never feel, after a single reading, as though you have command of everything you read. This is not a problem. After four or five readings (should you give any single text that much attention), you may still feel that there are parts you missed or don't understand. This sense of incompleteness is part of the experience of reading and certainly part of the experience of an observer in any life situation. There is always so much we do not know. That "not knowing" and incompleteness is part of the experience of an active reader. No reader could retain one of these texts in his mind, no matter how proficient his memory or how experienced he might be. No reader, at least no reader we would trust, would claim that he understood everything that Michel Foucault or Judith Butler or June Jordan had to say. What engaged and active readers know is that they have to begin,

and they have to begin regardless of their doubts or hesitations. After your first reading of a text, you have a starting place, and you begin with your marked passages or examples or notes, with questions to answer, or with problems to solve. Active readings, in other words, put a premium on individual acts of attention and composition.

ENGAGED READERS, ENGAGING TEXTS

We chose pieces for this book that invite engaged readings. Our selections require more attention (or a different form of attention) than a written summary, a reduction to gist, or a recitation of main ideas. These are not “easy” reading. The challenges they present, however, do not make them inaccessible to college students. The texts are not specialized studies; they have interested, pleased, or piqued general and specialist audiences alike. To say that they are challenging is to say, then, that they leave some work for a reader to do. They are designed to teach a reader new ways to read or see (or to step outside habitual ways of reading and seeing), and they anticipate readers willing to take the time to learn. These readers need not be experts on the subject matter. Perhaps the most difficult problem for students is to believe that this is true.

You do not need experts to explain these texts, although you could probably go to the library and find an expert guide to most of the selections we’ve included. Let’s take, for example, John Berger’s text “Ways of Seeing.” You could go to the library to find out how Berger is understood and regarded by experts, by literary critics or art historians, for example; you could learn how his work fits into an established body of work on art and representation. You could see what others have said about the writers he cites—Walter Benjamin, for example. You could see how others have read and made use of Berger. You could track one of his key terms, like *mystification*.

Though it is often important to seek out other texts and to know what other people are saying or have said, it is often necessary and even desirable to begin on your own. Berger can also be read outside any official system of interpretation. He is talking, after all, about our daily experience. And when he addresses the reader, he addresses a person—not a five-paragraph formula writer. When he says, “The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe,” you are part of that construction, part of the “we” he is invoking.

The primary question, then, is not what Berger’s words might mean to an art historian or to those with credentials as professors or as cultural critics. The question is what you, the reader, can make of those words given your own experience, your goals, and the work you do with what he has written. In this sense, “Ways of Seeing” is not what it means to others (those who have already decided what it means) but what it means to you, and this meaning is something you compose when you write about the text, even if the meaning you construct is tentative or uncertain.

I. A. Richards, a teacher, poet, and critic, once said, “Read as though it made sense and perhaps it will.” To take command of complex material like the selections in this book, you need not subordinate yourself to experts; you can assume the authority to provide such a reading on your own. This means you must allow

yourself a certain tentativeness and recognize your limits. You should not assume that it is your job to solve all the problems these texts present. You can speak with authority while still acknowledging that complex issues *are* complex. In fact, sometimes, as readers and as members of a society, we might do better to raise questions before we move to construct arguments about solutions.

READING WITH AND AGAINST THE GRAIN

Reading, then, requires a difficult mix of authority and humility. On the one hand, a reader takes charge of a text; on the other, a reader gives generous attention to someone else's (a writer's) key terms and methods, commits their time to her examples, tries to think in her language, and imagines that this strange work is important and compelling, at least for the moment. If, as we suggested earlier, reading is a kind of social interaction, this means you are equally a listener and a responder. It might help to think about what it really means to listen to another person, to try to understand their point of view, before offering your own response.

Most of the questions in *Ways of Reading* will have you moving back and forth in these two modes, reading with and against the grain of a text, reproducing an author's methods, questioning his or her direction and authority. To read generously, to work inside someone else's system, to see your world in someone else's terms—we call this "reading with the grain." It is a way of working *with* a writer's ideas, in conjunction with someone else's text. As a way of reading, it can take different forms. In the reading and writing assignments that follow the selections in this book, you will sometimes be asked to summarize and paraphrase, to put others' ideas into your terms, to provide your account of what they are saying. This is a way of getting a tentative or provisional hold on a text, its examples and ideas; it allows you a place to begin to work. And sometimes you will be asked to extend a writer's project—to add your examples to someone else's argument, to read your experience through the frame of another's text, to try out the key terms and interpretive schemes in another writer's work.

We also ask students to read against the grain, to read critically, to turn back, for example, *against* an author's project, to ask questions they believe might come as a surprise, to look for the limits of their vision, to provide alternate readings of the examples, to find examples that challenge their arguments—to engage the author, in other words, in dialogue.

Many of the texts in this book provide examples of writers working against the grain of common sense or everyday language. This is true of John Berger, for example, who redefines the "art museum" against the way it is usually understood. It is true of John Edgar Wideman, who reads against his own text while he writes it—asking questions that disturb the story as it emerges on the page. It is true of Layli Long Soldier who reads against dominant narratives of history. It is true of Aubrey Hirsch, Susan Griffin, and Claudia Rankine, whose writings show the signs of their efforts to work against the grain of

**MANY OF THE TEXTS IN THIS BOOK
PROVIDE EXAMPLES OF WRITERS
WORKING AGAINST THE GRAIN
OF COMMON SENSE OR EVERYDAY
LANGUAGE.**

habitual ways of representing what it means to know something, to be somebody, to speak before others.

This, we've found, is the most difficult work for students to do, this working against the grain. For reasons good and bad, students typically define their skill by reproducing, rather than questioning, extending, or revising the work of their teachers (or the work of those their teachers ask them to read). It is important to read generously and carefully, and to learn to listen to the projects others have begun. But it is also important to know what you are doing—to understand where this work comes from, whose interests it serves, how and where it is kept together by will rather than desire, and what it might have to do with you. To fail to ask the fundamental questions—Where am I in this? How can I make my mark? Whose interests are represented? What can I learn by reading with or against the grain?—is to mistake skill for understanding, and it is to misunderstand the goals of a liberal education. All of the essays in this book, we would argue, ask to be read, not simply reproduced; they ask to be read and to be read with a difference. Our goal is to make that difference possible.

Reading with and against the grain is one way to think about the work of reading. And even within this metaphor, there are more than two ways of reading. But we might also extend the work of the metaphor. Our students have explored this metaphor and have even come up with metaphors of their own for thinking about what reading is and what it means to do a reading. One student described reading as much like walking to the grocery store—one could take a direct route, focusing on the ultimate goal, perhaps making a list of items as he walked. One could also meander, not worrying about time or what items to purchase, but thinking instead about the sunset or the traffic patterns. Readers can be, in many ways, like walkers—sometimes focused and clear on their goals, sometimes allowing their minds to wander or notice something *other* than getting to the grocery store, sometimes ending up in places they didn't think they were going. Another student likened her reading to looking through a telescope in her astronomy course. For her, reading was like forming constellations, looking at a night sky for those sets of glimmers that might form something familiar, something she could name. A student who was studying civil engineering explained how reading, for him, seemed much like designing a bridge that connects two places. "It can look simple," he writes in an in-class writing activity. "When you drive over a bridge, you don't think about how many tiny details have gone into making the bridge stand. Reading is like that, too. Seems simple, but it's not." You might think of reading in a number of ways. The important part is that you broaden your understanding of what it means to read, that you challenge yourself to read in new ways so that you might then write in new ways as well.

WORKING WITH DIFFICULTY

As we said at the outset of this introduction, when we chose the selections for this textbook, we chose them with the understanding that they are difficult to read. And we chose them knowing that students are not their primary audience, that the selections are not necessarily speaking directly to you. We chose them,

in other words, knowing that we would be asking you to read something you were most likely not prepared to read. But this is what it means to be a student, and it is our goal to take our students seriously. Students have to do things they are not yet ready to do; this is how they learn. Students need to read materials that they are not yet ready to read. This is how they get started; this is where they begin. It is also the case that, in an academic setting, difficulty is not necessarily a problem. If something is hard to read, it is not necessarily the case that the writer is at fault. The work can be hard to read because the writer is thinking beyond the usual ways of thinking. It is hard because it *is* hard, in other words. The text is not saying the same old things in the same old ways.

We believe the best way to work on a difficult text is by rereading, and we provide exercises to direct this process ("Questions for a Second Reading"), but you can also work on the difficult text by writing—by taking possession of the work through sentences and paragraphs of your own, through summary, paraphrase, and quotation, by making another writer's work part of your work. The textbook is organized to provide ways for you to work on these difficult selections by writing and rereading. Each of the selections is followed by questions designed to help you get started.

To work with a difficult text, you have to get started somewhere and sometime, and you will almost always find yourself writing before you have a sense that you have fully comprehended what you have read. You have to get started somewhere, and then you can go back to work again on what you have begun by rereading and rewriting. The textbook provides guidelines for rereading.

When you are looking for help with a particular selection, you can, for example, turn to the "Questions for a Second Reading." Read through *all* of them, whether they are assigned or not, since they provide several entry points, different ways in, many of them suggested to us by our students in class and in their essays. You might imagine that these questions and the writing assignments that follow (and you might read through these writing assignments, too) provide starting points. Each suggests a different path through the essay. No one can hold a long and complicated essay in mind all at once. Every reader needs a starting point, a way in. Having more than one possible starting point allows you to make choices.

Once you have an entry point, where you have entered and how you have entered will help shape your sense of what is interesting or important in the text. In this sense, you (and not just the author) are organizing the work. The text will present its shape in terms of sections or stages. You should look for these road signs—breaks in the text or phrases that indicate intellectual movement, like "on the other hand" or "in conclusion." You

can be guided by these, to be sure, but you also give shape to what you read—and you do this most deliberately when you reread. This is where you find (and impose) patterns and connections that are not obvious and not already articulated

IN OUR OWN TEACHING, WE TALK TO OUR STUDENTS ABOUT "SCAFFOLDS." THE SCAFFOLD, WE SAY, REPRESENTS THE WAY YOU ARE ORGANIZING THE TEXT, THE WAY YOU ARE PUTTING IT TOGETHER.

but that make sense to you and give you a way to describe what you see in what you are reading. In our own teaching, we talk to our students about “scaffolds.” The scaffold, we say, represents the way you are organizing the text, the way you are putting it together. A scaffold is made up of lines and passages from the text, the terms you’ve found that you want to work with, ideas that matter to you, your sense of the progress of the piece.

The scaffold can also include the work of others. In groups or in class discussion, take notes on what other students say. This is good advice generally (you can always learn from your colleagues), but it is particularly useful in a class that features reading and writing. Your notes can document the ideas of others, to be sure, but most important, they can give you a sense of where other people are beginning, of where they have entered the text and what they are doing once they have started. You can infer the scaffold they have constructed to make sense of what they read, and this can give highlight and relief, even counterpoint, to your own. And use your teacher’s comments and questions, including those on your first drafts, to get a sense of the shape of your work as a reader and a writer. This is not a hunt for ideas, for the right or proper or necessary thing to say about a text. It is a hunt for a method, for a way of making sense of a text without resorting only to summary.

READING AND WRITING: THE QUESTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Active readers, we’ve said, remake what they have read to serve their own ends, putting things together, figuring out how ideas and examples relate, explaining as best they can material that is difficult or problematic, translating concepts like Judith Butler’s notion of “autonomy” into their own terms. At these moments, it is hard to distinguish the act of reading from the act of writing. In fact, the connection between reading and writing can be seen as almost a literal one, since the best way you can show your reading of a rich and dense text like “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy” is by writing down your thoughts, placing one idea against another, commenting on what you’ve done, taking examples into account, looking back at where you began, perhaps changing your mind, and moving on.

Readers, however, seldom read a single piece in isolation, as though their only job were to arrive at some sense of what a text has to say. Although we couldn’t begin to provide examples of all the various uses of these ways of reading, it is often the case that readings provide information and direction for investigative projects, whether they are philosophical or scientific in nature. The reading and writing assignments that follow each selection in this book are designed to point you in certain directions, to give you ideas and projects to work with, and to challenge you to see one writer’s ideas through another’s.

You will find that the questions we have included in our reading and writing assignments often direct you to test what you think an author is saying by measuring it against your own experience. One way for you to develop or test your reading of a text is to place what the author says in the context of your own experience, searching for examples that are similar to and examples that differ from the author’s examples. If the writers in this book are urging you to give strong readings of your common experience, you have access to what they say because

they are talking not only to you but about you. You can try out their methods and their terms on examples of your own, continuing their arguments as though you were working together on a common project. Or you can test their arguments as though you want to see not only where and how they will work but also where and how they will not.

Readers, as we have said, seldom read a text in isolation, as though, having once worked out a reading of Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities," they could go on to something else, something unrelated. It is unusual for anyone, at least in an academic setting, to read in so random a fashion. Readers read most often because they have a project in hand—a question they are working on or a problem they are trying to solve. For example, if as a result of reading Appiah's essay you become interested in questions of race and identity, and you begin to notice things you would not have noticed before, then you can read other essays in the book through this frame. If you have a project in mind, that project will help determine how you read these other essays. Sections of a text that might otherwise seem unimportant suddenly become important—Gloria Anzaldúa's unusual prose style, or John Edgar Wideman's account of his racial politics in Pittsburgh. Appiah may enable you to read Wideman's narrative differently. Wideman may spur you to rethink Appiah. In a sense, you have the chance to become an expert reader, a reader with a project in hand, one who has already done some reading, who has watched others at work, and who has begun to develop a method of analysis and a set of key terms. Imagining yourself operating alongside some of the major figures in contemporary thought can be great fun and heady work—particularly when you have the occasion to speak back to them.

You may find that you have to alter your sense of who a writer is and what a writer does as you work on your own writing. Writers are often told that they need to begin with a clear sense of what they want to do and what they want to say. The writing assignments we've written, we believe, give you a sense of what you want (or need) to do. We define a problem for you to work on, and the problem will frame the task for you. You will have to decide where you will go in the texts you have read to find materials to work with, the primary materials that will give you a place to begin as you work on your essay. It might be best, however, if you did not feel that you need to have a clear sense of what you want to say before you begin. You may begin to develop a sense of what you want to say while you are writing. It may also be the case that the subjects you will be writing about are too big for you to assume that you need to have all the answers or that it is up to you to have the final word or to solve the problems once and for all. When you work on your essays, you should cast yourself in the role of one who is exploring a question, examining what might be said, and speculating on possible rather than certain conclusions. Consider your responses provisional. Think of yourself as a writer intent on opening a subject up rather than closing one down.

**THINK OF YOURSELF AS A
WRITER INTENT ON OPENING
A SUBJECT UP RATHER THAN
CLOSING ONE DOWN.**

Let us turn briefly now to the three categories of reading and writing assignments you will find in the book.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

Immediately following each selection are questions designed to guide your second reading. You may, as we've said, prefer to follow your own instincts as you search for the materials to build your understanding of the reading. These questions are meant to assist that process or develop those instincts. Most of the selections in the book are longer and more difficult than those you may be accustomed to reading. They are difficult enough that any reader would have to reread them and work to understand them; these questions are meant to suggest ways of beginning that work.

The second-reading questions characteristically ask you to consider the relations between ideas and examples in what you have read or to test specific statements in the essays against your own experience (so that you can get a sense of the author's habit of mind, his or her way of thinking about subjects that are available to you, too). Some turn your attention to what we take to be key terms or concepts, asking you to define these terms by observing how the writer uses them throughout the essay.

These questions have no simple answers; you will not find a correct answer hidden somewhere in the selection. In short, they are not the sorts of questions asked on SAT or ACT exams. They are real questions. They pose problems for interpretation or indicate sections where, to our minds, there is some interesting work for a reader to do. They are meant to reveal possible ways of reading the text, not to indicate that there is only one correct way, and that we have it.

You may find it useful to take notes as you read through each selection a second time, perhaps in a journal you can keep as a sourcebook for more formal written work. We will often divide our students into groups, with each group working together with one of the second-reading questions in preparation for a report to the class. There are important advantages for you as a *writer* when you do this kind of close work with the text. Working through a second time, you get a better sense of the argument and of the *shape* of the argument; you get a sense of not only what the author is *saying* but what she is *doing*, and this prepares you to provide not only summary and paraphrase but also a sense of the author and her project. The work of rereading sends you back to the text; the second time through you can locate passages you might very well want to use in your own writing — passages that are particularly interesting to you, or illustrative, or even puzzling and obscure. These become the quotations you can use to bring the author's words into your essay, to bring them in as the object of scrutiny and discussion.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

This book actually offers three kinds of writing assignments: assignments that ask you to respond to a single essay or story, assignments that ask you to read one selection through the frame of another, and longer sequences of assignments that define a project within which three or four of the selections serve as primary sources. All of these assignments serve a dual purpose. Like the second-reading

questions, they suggest a way for you to reconsider the essays; they give you access from a different perspective. The assignments also encourage you to be an engaged reader and actively interpret what you have read. In one way or another, they all invite you to use a reading as a way of framing experience, as a source of terms and methods to enable you to interpret something else — some other text, events and objects around you, or your own memories and experience. The assignment sequences can be found at the end of the book and in *Resources for Teaching Ways of Reading*. The others (“Assignments for Writing” and “Making Connections”) come immediately after each selection.

“Assignments for Writing” ask you to write about a single selection. Although some of these assignments call for you to paraphrase or reconstruct difficult passages, most ask you to interpret what you have read with a specific purpose in mind. For most of the texts, one question asks you to interpret a moment from your own experience through the frame of the essay — adapting its method, using its key terms, extending the range of its examples. Other assignments, however, ask you to turn an essay back on itself or to extend the conclusions of the essay by reconsidering the examples the writer has used to make his case. And some assignments don’t ask you to write an essay at all, but rather invite you to explore alternative forms — to write your own gathering of fragments in response to Hirsch, your own graphic chapter after reading Bechdel’s work, or your own instruction list after reading Roxane Gay’s work.

When we talk with teachers and students using *Ways of Reading*, we are often asked about the wording of these assignments. The assignments are long. The wording is often unusual, unexpected. The assignments contain many questions, not simply one. The directions seem indirect, confusing. “Why?” we’re asked. “How should we work with these?” When we write assignments, our goal is to point students toward a project, to provide a frame for their reading, a motive for writing, a way of asking certain kinds of questions. In that sense, the assignments should not be read as a set of directions to be followed literally. In fact, they are written to resist that reading, to forestall a writer’s desire to simplify, to be efficient, to settle for the first clear line toward the finish. We want to provide a context to suggest how readers and writers might take time, be thoughtful. And we want the projects students work on to become their own. We hope to provoke varied responses, to leave the final decisions to the students. So the assignments try to be open and suggestive rather than narrow and direct. We ask lots of questions, but students don’t need to answer them all (or any of them) once they begin to write. Our questions are meant to suggest ways of questioning, starting points. “What do you want?” Our own students ask this question. We want writers to make the most they can of what they read, including our questions and assignments.

So, what’s the best way to work with an assignment? The writing assignments we have written will provide a context for writing, even a set of expectations, but the assignments do not provide a set of instructions. The first thing to do, then, is to ask yourself what, within this context, do you want to write about? What is on your mind? What is interesting or pressing for you? What direction can you take that will best allow you to stretch or to challenge yourself or to do something that will be new and interesting? We will often set aside class time to talk

through an assignment and what possibilities it might suggest for each student's work. (We don't insist that everyone take the same track.) And we invite students to be in touch with us and with one another outside of class or online. Writers and scholars often rely on their friends and colleagues to help them get an angle, think about where to begin, understand what is new and interesting and what is old and dull. And, then, finally, the moment comes and you just sit down and start writing. There is no magic here, unfortunately. You write out what you can, and then you go back to what you have written to see what you are saying, and to see what comes next, and to think about how to shape it all into a text to give to readers in the hope that they might call it "persuasive," "troubling," "beautiful."

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The connections questions will have you work with two or more readings at a time. These are not so much questions that ask you to compare or contrast the essays or stories as they are directions on how you might use one text as the context for interpreting another. Mary Louise Pratt, for example, in "Arts of the Contact Zone," looks at the work of a South American native, an Inca named Guaman Poma, writing in the seventeenth century to King Philip III of Spain. His work, she argues, can be read as a moment of contact, one in which different cultures and positions of power come together in a single text—in which a conquered person responds to the ways he is represented in the mind and the language of the conqueror. Pratt's reading of Guaman Poma's letter to King Philip, and the terms she uses to describe the way she reads it, provide a powerful context for a reader looking at essays by other writers, like Gloria Anzaldúa, for whom the "normal" or "standard" language of American culture is difficult, troubling, unsatisfactory, or incomplete. There are, then, assignments that ask you both to extend and to test Pratt's reading through your reading of alternative texts.

Reading one essay through the lens of another becomes a focused form of rereading. To write responses to these assignments, you will need to reread both of the assigned selections. The best way to begin is by taking a quick inventory of what you recall as points of connection. You could do this on your own, with a colleague, or in groups, but it is best to do it with pen and paper (or laptop) in hand. And before you reread, you should come to at least a provisional sense of what you want to do with the assignment. Then you can reread with a project in mind. Be sure to mark passages that you can work with later when you are writing. And look for passages that are interestingly different as well as those that complement each other.

THE ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCES

The assignment sequences are more broad-ranging versions of the "Making Connections" assignments; in the sequences, several reading and writing assignments are linked and directed toward a single goal. They allow you to work on projects that require more time and incorporate more readings than would be possible in a single assignment. And they encourage you to develop your own

point of view in concert with those of the professionals who wrote the essays and stories you are reading.

The assignments in a sequence build on one another, each relying on the ones before. A sequence will usually make use of four or five reading selections. The first is used to introduce an area of study or inquiry as well as to establish a frame of reference, a way of thinking about the subject. Subsequent assignments ask you to work through other readings and ideas on the subject.

The sequences allow you to participate in an extended academic project, one in which you take a position, revise it, look at a new example, hear what someone else has to say, revise it again, and see what conclusions you can draw about your subject. These projects always take time—they go through stages and revisions as a writer develops a command over her material, pushing against habitual ways of thinking, learning to examine an issue from different angles, rejecting quick conclusions, seeing the power of understanding that comes from repeated effort, and feeling the pleasure writers take when they find their own place in significant conversations that connect to their lived experience.

THE SEQUENCES ALLOW YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN AN EXTENDED ACADEMIC PROJECT.

THE
Readings



GLORIA Anzaldúa

Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) grew up in southwest Texas, the physical and cultural borderland between the United States and Mexico, an area she called “*una herida abierta*,” an open wound, “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.” Defining herself as lesbian, feminist, Chicana — a representative of the new *mestiza* — she dramatically revised the usual narrative of American autobiography. “I am a border woman,” she said. “I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life.” Cultural, physical, spiritual, sexual, linguistic — the borderlands defined by Anzaldúa extend beyond geography. “In fact,” she said, “the Borderlands are present where two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.” In a sense, her writing argues against the concept of an “authentic,” unified, homogeneous culture, the pure “Mexican experience,” a nostalgia that underlies much of the current interest in “ethnic” literature.

In the following selection from her book *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa mixes genres, moving between poetry and prose, weaving stories with sections that resemble the work of a cultural or political theorist. She tells us a story about her childhood, her culture, and her people that is at once both myth and history. Her prose, too, is mixed, shifting among Anglo-American English, Castilian Spanish, Tex-Mex, Northern Mexican dialect, and Nahuatl (Aztec), speaking to us in the particular mix that represents her linguistic heritage: “Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture — to translate to Anglos, Mexicans, and Latinos, apology blurting out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you.” The book is an invitation, but not always an easy one. The selection that follows makes a variety of demands on the reader. The shifting styles, genres, and languages can be confusing or disturbing, but this is part of the effect of Anzaldúa’s prose, part of the experience you are invited to share.

In a chapter from the book that is not included here, Anzaldúa gives this account of her writing:

In looking at this book that I'm almost finished writing, I see a mosaic pattern (Aztec-like) emerging, a weaving pattern, thin here, thick there. I see a preoccupation with the deep structure, the underlying structure, with the gesso underpainting that is red earth, black earth. . . . This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has had a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will.

Beyond her prose, she sees the competing values of more traditionally organized narratives, "art typical of Western European cultures, [which] attempts to manage the energies of its own internal system. . . . It is dedicated to the validation of itself. Its task is to move humans by means of achieving mastery in content, technique, feeling. Western art is always whole and always 'in power.'"

Anzaldúa's prose puts you, as a reader, on the borderland; in a way, it re-creates the position of the mestiza. As you read, you will need to meet this prose halfway, generously, learning to read a text that announces its difference.

In addition to *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa edited *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (1990) and coedited an anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983). She published a book for children, *Prietita and the Ghost Woman* (1996), which retells traditional Mexican folktales from a feminist perspective. A collection of interviews, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, was published in 2000, and a coedited anthology of multicultural feminist theory titled *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* was published in 2002.



How to Tame a Wild Tongue

"We're going to have to control your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. "I can't cap that tooth yet, you're still draining," he says.

"We're going to have to do something about your tongue," I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. "I've never seen anything as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?

"Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?"

—RAY GWYN SMITH¹

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess — that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong."

"I want you to speak English. *Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent,'*" my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents.

Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

OVERCOMING THE TRADITION OF SILENCE

*Ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro.
Peleando con nuestra propia sombra
el silencio nos sepulta.*

En boca cerrada no entran moscas. "Flies don't enter a closed mouth" is a saying I kept hearing when I was a child. *Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls

don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, *hablar pa' trás*, *repelar*. *Hocicon*, *repelona*, *chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women — I've never heard them applied to men.

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word "*nosotras*," I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

And our tongues have become
dry the wilderness has
dried out our tongues and
we have forgotten speech.

—IRENA KLEPFISZ²

Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia*.

OYÉ COMO LADRA: EL LENGUAJE DE LA FRONTERA

Quien tiene boca se equivoca.

—Mexican saying

"Pocho, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language," I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución*, *enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje*. *Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves — a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.

**WE SPEAK A PATOIS, A
FORKED TONGUE, A VARIATION
OF TWO LANGUAGES.**

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest — for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*)

My "home" tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6 and 7 being closest to my heart. From school, the media and job situations, I've picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Locha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I've picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From *los recién llegados*, Mexican immigrants, and *braceros*, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I'll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley, I picked up Chicano Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom, younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts and older relatives.

With Chicanas from *Nuevo México* or *Arizona* I will speak Chicano Spanish a little, but often they don't understand what I'm saying. With most California Chicanas I speak entirely in English (unless I forget). When I first moved to San Francisco, I'd rattle off something in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana *tejana* that I can talk freely.

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or *pochismos*. The *pocho* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English.³ Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother Nune and with Chicano *tejano* contemporaries I speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up *Pachuco*. *Pachuco* (the language of the zoot suiters) is a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. *Ruca* means girl or woman, *vato* means guy or dude, *chale* means no, *simón* means yes, *churo* is sure, talk is *periquiar*,

pigionear means petting, *que gacho* means how nerdy, *ponte águila* means watch out, death is called *la pelona*. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the *Pachuco* tongue.

CHICANO SPANISH

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as *maíz/maiz*, *cohete/cuete*. We leave out certain consonants when they appear between vowels: *lado/lao*, *mojado/mojao*. Chicanos from South Texas pronounce *f* as *j* as in *jue* (*fue*). Chicanos use "archaisms," words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say *semos*, *truje*, *haiga*, *ansina*, and *naiden*. We retain the "archaic" *j*, as in *jalar*, that derives from an earlier *h* (the French *halar* or the Germanic *halon* which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. (Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majority of the Spanish colonizers in Mexico and the Southwest came from Extremadura — Hernán Cortés was one of them — and Andalucía. Andalusians pronounce *ll* like a *y*, and their *d*'s tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: *tirado* becomes *tirao*. They brought *el lenguaje popular, dialectos, y regionalismos*.⁴)

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift *ll* to *y* and *z* to *s*.⁵ We leave out initial syllables, saying *tar* for *estar*, *toy* for *estoy*, *hora* for *ahora* (*cubanos* and *puertorriqueños* also leave out initial letters of some words.) We also leave out the final syllable such as *pa* for *para*. The intervocalic *y*, the *ll* as in *tortilla*, *ella*, *botella*, gets replaced by *tortia* or *toriya*, *ea*, *botea*. We add an additional syllable at the beginning of certain words: *atocar* for *tocar*, *agastar* for *gastar*. Sometimes we'll say *lavaste las vacijas*, other times *lavates* (substituting the *ates* verb endings for the *aste*).

We use anglicisms, words borrowed from English: *bola* from ball, *carpeta* from carpet, *máquina de lavar* (instead of *lavadora*) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word such as *cookiar* for cook, *watchar* for watch, *parkiar* for park, and *rapiar* for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English.

We don't use the word *vosotros/as* or its accompanying verb form. We don't say *claro* (to mean yes), *imagínate*, or *me emociona*, unless we picked up Spanish from Latinas, out of a book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

LINGUISTIC TERRORISM

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic

mestizaje, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos* — we speak an orphan tongue.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out. Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. *Pena*. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a first language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with *mexicanas y latinas* we'll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're *agringadas* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the "real" Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes because French is considered more "cultured." But for a language to remain alive it must be used.⁶ By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity — I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue — my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

My fingers
move sly against your palm
Like women everywhere, we speak in code. . . .
—MELANIE KAYE/KANTROWITZ⁷

"VISTAS," CORRIDOS, Y COMIDA: MY NATIVE TONGUE

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was *City of Night* by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I read *I Am Joaquín*⁸ I was surprised to see a bilingual book by a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one adviser after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in — the Thursday night special of \$1.00 a carload — that gave me a sense of belonging. "*Vámonos a las vistas*," my mother would call out and we'd all — grandmother, brothers, sister and cousins — squeeze into the car. We'd wolf down cheese and bologna white bread sandwiches while watching Pedro Infante in melodramatic tear-jerkers like *Nosotros los pobres*, the first "real" Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing *Cuando los hijos se van* and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing-type "westerns" of Jorge Negrete and Miguel Aceves Mejía. When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn't go to Mexican movies, or *bailes* or tune their radios to *bolero*, *rancherita*, and *corrido* music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was *norteño* music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or *cantina* (bar) music. I grew up listening to *conjuntos*, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, *bajo sexto*, drums and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German

immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when *corridos* — songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands — reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local *cantinas* and wafted in through my bedroom window.

Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas/Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The *corridos* are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa's song, "*La cucaracha*," is the most famous one. *Corridos* of John F. Kennedy and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border *corrido* singers who was called *la Gloria de Tejas*. Her "*El tango negro*," sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The ever present *corridos* narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as entertaining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural mythmakers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland. Woodsmoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodsmoke perfuming my grandmother's clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the reek of cordite. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy *menudo*, *chile colorado* making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbecuing *fajitas* in the backyard. Even now and 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork and venison with *chile*. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* I would be eating if I were home.

SI LE PREGUNTAS A MI MAMÁ, "¿QUÉ ERES?"

"Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside."

—KAUFMAN⁹

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side

we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don't say *nosotros los americanos*, o *nosotros los españoles*, o *nosotros los hispanos*. We say *nosotros los mexicanos* (by *mexicanos* we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul — not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres.

(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.)

—Mexican saying

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?" te dirá, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer "*soy mexicana*" and at others will say "*soy Chicana*" o "*soy tejana*." But I identified as "*Raza*" before I ever identified as "*mexicana*" or "*Chicana*."

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70 to 80% Indian.¹⁰ We call ourselves Hispanic¹¹ or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American¹² to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when copping out).

**SI LE PREGUNTAS A MI MAMÁ,
"¿QUÉ ERES?" TE DIRÁ,
"SOY MEXICANA."**

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity — we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers united and *I Am Joaquín* was published and *la Raza Unida* party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul — we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and

a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together — who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, *tenemos que hacer la lucha. ¿Quién está protegiendo los ranchos de mi gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la fisura entre la india y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, sí, el Chicano que anda como un ladrón en su propia casa.*

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us.¹³ We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano* culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they've created, lie bleached. *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild, *nosotros los mexicanos*-Chicanos will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain.

NOTES

¹ Ray Gwyn Smith, *Moorland Is Cold Country*, unpublished book. [All notes are Anzaldúa's.]

² Irena Klepfisz, "Di rayze aheym/The Journey Home," in *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology*, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz, eds. (Montpelier, VT: Sinister Wisdom Books, 1986), 49.

³ R. C. Ortega, *Dialectología Del Barrio*, trans. Hortencia S. Alwan (Los Angeles, CA: R. C. Ortega Publisher & Bookseller, 1977), 132.

⁴ Eduardo Hernández-Chávez, Andrew D. Cohen, and Anthony F. Beltramo, *El Lenguaje de los Chicanos: Regional and Social Characteristics of Language Used by Mexican Americans* (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975), 39.

⁵ Hernández-Chávez, xvii.

⁶ Irena Klepfisz, "Secular Jewish Identity: Yidishkayt in America," in *The Tribe of Dina*, Kaye/Kantrowitz and Klepfisz, eds., 43.

⁷ Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Sign," in *We Speak in Code: Poems and Other Writings* (Pittsburgh, PA: Motherroot Publications, Inc., 1980), 85.

⁸ Rodolfo Gonzales, *I Am Joaquín/Yo Soy Joaquín* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1972). It was first published in 1967.

⁹ Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1980), 68.

¹⁰ John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Images of the Southwest* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 88–90.

¹¹ "Hispanic" is derived from *Hispanis* (*España*, a name given to the Iberian Peninsula in ancient times when it was a part of the Roman Empire) and is a term designated by the U.S. government to make it easier to handle us on paper.

¹² The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the Mexican-American in 1848.

¹³ Anglos, in order to alleviate their guilt for dispossessing the Chicano, stressed the Spanish part of us and perpetrated the myth of the Spanish Southwest. We have accepted the fiction that we are Hispanic, that is Spanish, in order to accommodate ourselves to the dominant culture and its abhorrence of Indians. Chávez, 88–91.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. The most immediate challenge to many readers of this chapter will be the sections that are written in Spanish. Part of the point of a text that mixes languages is to give non-Spanish-speaking readers the feeling of being lost, excluded, left out. What is a reader to do with this prose? One could learn Spanish and come back to reread, but this is not a quick solution and, according to Anzaldúa, not even a completely satisfactory one, since some of her Spanish is drawn from communities of speakers not represented in textbooks and classes.

So how do you read this text if you don't read Spanish? Do you ignore the words? sound them out? improvise? Anzaldúa gives translations of some words or phrases, but not all. Which ones does she translate? Why? Reread this chapter with the goal of explaining how you handled Anzaldúa's polyglot style.

2. This chapter is made up of shorter sections written in a variety of styles (some as prose poems, some with endnotes, some as stories). And while the sections are obviously ordered, the order is not a conventional argumentative one. The text is, as Anzaldúa says elsewhere in her book, "an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work, . . . a crazy dance":

In looking at this book that I'm almost finished writing, I see a mosaic pattern (Aztec-like) emerging, a weaving pattern, thin here, thick there. . . . This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has had a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will. It is a rebellious, willful entity, a precocious girl-child forced to grow up too quickly, rough, unyielding, with pieces of feather sticking out here and there, fur, twigs, clay. My child, but not for much longer. This female being is angry, sad, joyful, is Coatlicue, dove, horse, serpent, cactus. Though it is a flawed thing — clumsy, complex, groping, blind thing, for me it is alive, infused with spirit. I talk to it; it talks to me.

This is not, in other words, a conventional text; it makes unexpected demands on a reader. As you reread, mark sections you could use to talk about how, through the text, Anzaldúa invents a reader and/or a way of reading. Who is Anzaldúa's ideal reader? What does he or she need to be able to do?

3. Although Anzaldúa's text is not a conventional one, it makes an argument and proposes terms and examples for its readers to negotiate. How might you summarize Anzaldúa's argument in this chapter? How does the chapter mark stages or parts of her argument? As you reread this selection, mark those passages where Anzaldúa seems to you to be creating a case or an argument. What are its key terms? its key examples? its conclusions?

 . . . ● . . .
 ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Anzaldúa has described her text as a kind of crazy dance (see the second "Question for a Second Reading"); it is, she says, a text with a mind of its own, "putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will." Hers is a prose full of variety and seeming contradictions; it is a writing that could be said to represent the cultural "crossroads" which is her experience / sensibility.

As an experiment whose goal is the development of an alternate (in Anzaldúa's terms, a mixed or *mestiza*) understanding, write an autobiographical text whose shape and motives could be described in her terms: a mosaic, woven, with numerous overlays; a montage, a beaded work, a crazy dance, drawing on the various ways of thinking, speaking, understanding that might be said to be part of your own mixed cultural position, your own mixed sensibility.

To prepare for this essay, think about the different positions you could be said to occupy, the different voices that are part of your background or present, the competing ways of thinking that make up your points of view. Imagine that your goal is to present your world and your experience to those who are not necessarily prepared to be sympathetic or to understand. And, following Anzaldúa, you should work to construct a mixed text, not a single unified one. This will be hard, since you will be writing what might be called a "forbidden" text, one you have not been prepared to write.

2. In "*La Conciencia de la Mestiza* / Towards a New Consciousness," the last essay-like chapter in her book (the remaining chapters are made up of poems), Anzaldúa steps forward to define her role as writer and yours as reader. She says, among other things,

Many women and men of color do not want to have any dealings with white people. . . . Many feel that whites should help their own people rid themselves of race hatred and fear first. I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator. I think we need to allow whites to be our allies. Through our literature, art, *corridos*, and folktales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos or the Chicano farmworkers or *los Nicaragüenses* they won't turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances. They will come to see that they are not helping us but following our lead.

Individually, but also as a racial entity, we need to voice our needs. We need to say to white society: We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for

power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty — you'd rather forget your brutish acts. To say you've split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the "negative" parts onto us.... To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intracultural split will heal. And finally, tell us what you need from us.

This is only a part of the text — one of the ways it defines the roles of reader and writer — but it is one that asks to be taken account of, with its insistent list of what a white reader must do and say. (Of course not every reader is white, and not all white readers are the same. What Anzaldúa is defining here is a "white" way of reading.)

Write an essay in which you tell a story of reading, the story of your work with the chapter of *Borderlands / La Frontera* reprinted here. Think about where you felt at home with the text and where you felt lost, where you knew what you were doing and where you needed help; think about the position (or positions) you have taken as a reader and how it measures up against the ways Anzaldúa has figured you in the text, the ways she has anticipated a response, imagined who you are and how you habitually think and read.

3. In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa says, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue — my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice" (p. 27). Anzaldúa speaks about "having her voice," not a single, "authentic" voice, but one she names in these terms: Indian, Spanish, white; woman, lesbian, poet. What is "voice" as defined by this chapter? Where does it come from? What does it have to do with the act of writing or the writer?

As you reread this chapter, mark those passages that you think best represent Anzaldúa's voices. Using these passages as examples, write an essay in which you discuss how these voices are different — both different from one another and different from a "standard" voice (as a "standard" voice is imagined by Anzaldúa). What do these voices represent? How do they figure in your reading? in her writing?

4. Anzaldúa's writing is difficult to categorize as an essay or a story or a poem; it has all of these within it. The writing may appear to have been just put together, but it is more likely that it was carefully crafted to represent the various voices Anzaldúa understands to be a part of her. She speaks directly about her voices — her woman's voice, her sexual voice, her poet's voice; her Indian, Spanish, and white voices on page 26 of "How to Tame a Wild Tongue."

Following Anzaldúa, write an argument of your own, one that requires you to use a variety of voices, in which you carefully present the various voices that you feel are a part of you or a part of the argument.

When you have completed this assignment, write a two-page essay in which you explain why the argument you made might be worth a reader's attention.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. In "Arts of the Contact Zone" (p. 454), Mary Louise Pratt talks about the "autoethnographic" text, "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them," and about "transculturation," the "processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture."

Write an essay in which you present a reading of this chapter as an example of an autoethnographic and / or transcultural text. You should imagine that you are writing to someone who is not familiar with either Pratt's argument or Anzaldúa's book. Part of your work, then, is to present Anzaldúa's text to readers who don't have it in front of them. You have the example of Pratt's reading of Guaman Poma's *New Chronicle and Good Government*. And you have her discussion of the "literate arts of the contact zone." Think about how Anzaldúa's text might be similarly read, and about how her text does and doesn't fit Pratt's description. Your goal should be to add an example to Pratt's discussion and to qualify it, to give her discussion a new twist or spin now that you have had a chance to look at an additional example.

2. Writers often layer their essays with metaphors or, in Anzaldúa's case, with narratives that serve as kinds of metaphor. One way to identify moments of metaphor that layer a piece of writing is to notice when particular sentences or images seem to carry more than one meaning. For example, when Anzaldúa tells us what the dentist says ("We're going to have to do something about your tongue"), we might notice that the dentist's statement has more than one meaning, that what he literally says is meant to signal something else, something larger and more complex than this specific moment. Many of the writers in this collection make use of metaphor in their work, inviting readers to see multiple meanings in a single moment.

Reread Anzaldúa, looking for those metaphorical moments, marking sentences that seem to point to something larger. Then reread Susan Griffin's "Our Secret" (p. 351), looking for similar moments. Write an essay in which you guide your own reader through these authors' use of metaphor, choosing some specific examples from each essay. Consider the following questions: How do these passages point to something larger than themselves?

How are you, as a reader, affected by the use of the metaphor, and how does the metaphor serve to layer the essay — to complicate or illuminate its subject matter? Why do writers rely on metaphors?

3. Anzaldúa writes, “So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity — I am my language” (p. 26). In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa seems to suggest that our language(s) are essential to our identities, perhaps even essential to our humanity, or to what Judith Butler calls “a livable life.” Both Butler and Anzaldúa seem concerned with, as Butler puts it, the ways “life itself becomes foreclosed when the right way is decided in advance, when we impose what is right for everyone and without finding a way to enter into community, and to discover there the ‘right’ in the midst of cultural translation” (p. 199). Butler wrote “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy” about twenty years after Anzaldúa first published “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” and while Butler’s piece does not specifically address the linguistic particularities of Anzaldúa’s piece, their work is certainly in conversation — raising some similar questions and offering some alternative ways of thinking about culture, identity, and language.

Write an essay in which you enact some inquiry into a specific question (likely an unanswerable one) that you think is key for *both* Butler and Anzaldúa. You might begin by asking what seem to be the central questions for each writer, and how do those central questions overlap? Once you’ve brainstormed a bit (perhaps even with classmates) about these central questions, choose one that is particularly interesting to you. In your essay, you’ll want to both argue for the importance of asking this question in the first place *and* discuss the ways Butler and Anzaldúa offer you answers or approaches to this central question.



KWAME ANTHONY Appiah

Kwame Anthony Appiah (pronounced AP-ee-a, with the accent on the first syllable) was born in London. He grew up in Asante, Ghana, before eventually returning to England to earn his MA and PhD degrees from Cambridge. He has taught at Yale, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Princeton, and, most recently, New York University, where he is a Professor of Philosophy and Law. Appiah's father was Ghanaian and a leader in the struggle for Pan-Africanism and Ghanaian independence from Britain; his mother, originally Peggy Cripps, was British and the daughter of a leading figure in the Labour government. Appiah's work circulates widely and has won numerous awards. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society and was inducted in 2008 into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2012, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal.

Appiah's life illustrates the virtues of a "rooted cosmopolitanism," a term he offers to describe a desired way of living in the world, and it illustrates the difficulties we face in naming someone as black or white or African or American. In the preface to his book *The Ethics of Identity* (2005), he says,

What has proved especially vexatious, though, is the effort to take account of those social forms we now call identities: genders and sexual orientations, ethnicities and nationalities, professions and vocations. Identities make ethical claims because — and this is just a fact about the world we human beings have created — we make our lives as men and as women, as gay and as straight people, as Ghanaians and as Americans, as blacks and as whites. Immediately, conundrums start to assemble. Do identities represent a curb on autonomy, or do they provide its contours: What claims, if any, can identity groups as such justly make upon the state? These are concerns that have gained a certain measure of salience in recent political philosophy, but, as I hope to show, they are anything but newfangled. What's modern is that we conceptualize identity in particular ways. What's age-old is that when we are asked — and ask ourselves — who we are, we are being asked what we are as well. (p. xiv)

Appiah is an award-winning and prolific writer. His books include *Assertion and Conditionals* (1985), *For Truth in Semantics* (1986), *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1992), *The Ethics of Identity* (2005), *Cosmopolitanism*:

Ethics in a World of Strangers (2007), *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (2010), *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (2014), *As If: Idealization and Ideals* (2017), and *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (2018). He is also the author of three mystery novels, *Avenging Angel* (1991), *Nobody Likes Letitia* (1994), and *Another Death in Venice* (1995); a textbook, *Thinking It Through: An Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (2003); and, with Henry Louis Gates Jr., the editor of the *Encarta Africana* CD-ROM encyclopedia. The selection that follows was taken from a book coauthored with Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (1996), winner of the 1997 Ralph J. Bunche award from the American Political Science Association. *Color Conscious* is drawn from the lectures Appiah and Gutmann gave as the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at the University of California, San Diego. We've included one section from Appiah's half of the exchange, so at times he will allude to things he said earlier in that chapter. The section we've provided can, however, easily stand alone and be read as a single, coherent essay.

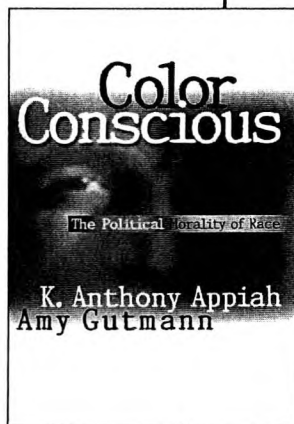
As you read "Racial Identities," it will help to pay particular attention to voice—to the way the writer locates himself within available ways of speaking and thinking. Appiah writes as a philosopher. That is, he writes from within ideas, from within trains of thought. He is not necessarily endorsing these ways of thinking. They are not necessarily his thought processes or ones he would endorse. He is trying them on, testing their consequences or limits, showing where they might lead.

You can't, in other words, quickly assume that an affirmative sentence expresses Appiah's own thoughts or beliefs. This is tricky. For example, listen to these sentences. Where might you locate Appiah?

I have insisted that African-Americans do not have a single culture, in the sense of shared language, values, practices, and meanings. But many people who think of races as groups defined by shared cultures, conceive that sharing in a different way. They understand black people as sharing black culture by *definition*: jazz or hip-hop belongs to an African-American, whether she likes it or knows anything about it, because it is culturally marked as black. Jazz belongs to a black person who knows nothing about it more fully or naturally than it does to a white jazzman. (p. 48)

Appiah is not saying that he believes jazz belongs to a black person more fully or naturally than it does to a white person. He is saying that "many people" have a way of thinking about race and culture that will lead them to such statements or beliefs. In a recent interview in *New York Magazine*, Appiah is quoted as saying, "We're just very bad at treating other people's identities with the same care with which we're happy to treat our own." This is perhaps one way of thinking of his motivations as a scholar and thinker. Appiah is, like many scholars and writers, concerned with the ways we treat one another.

Learning to read along with a philosopher, with a writer who is thinking about ways of thinking, is challenging. As you read, keep an ear cocked for moments when Appiah gives voice to others, and be alert for those moments (and they are fewer) when he speaks for himself.



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Racial Identities

"SPEAKING OF CIVILIZATIONS"

In 1911, responding to what was already clear evidence that race was not doing well as a biological concept, W.E.B. Du Bois, the African-American sociologist, historian, and activist, wrote in *The Crisis*, the magazine of the NAACP, which he edited:

The leading scientists of the world have come forward . . . and laid down in categorical terms a series of propositions¹ which may be summarized as follows:

1. (a) It is not legitimate to argue from differences in physical characteristics to differences in mental characteristics . . .
2. The civilization of a . . . race at any particular moment of time offers no index to its innate or inherited capacities . . .²

And he concluded: "So far at least as intellectual and moral aptitudes are concerned we ought to speak of civilizations where we now speak of races."³ I have argued before that Du Bois's proposal to "speak of civilizations" turns out not to replace a biological notion but simply to hide it from view.⁴ I think there are various difficulties with the way that argument proceeded, and I should like to do better. So let me try to reconstruct a sociohistorical view that has more merit than I have previously conceded.

Among the most moving of Du Bois's statements of the meaning of "race" conceived in sociohistorical terms is the one in *Dusk of Dawn*, the "autobiography of a race concept," as he called it, which he published in 1940. Du Bois wrote:

The actual ties of heritage between the individuals of this group, vary with the ancestors that they have in common with many others: Europeans and Semites, perhaps Mongolians, certainly American Indians. But the physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa.⁵

For reasons I shall be able to make clear only when I have given my account, Du Bois's own approach is somewhat misleading. So instead of proceeding with exegesis of Du Bois, I must turn next to the task of shaping a sociohistorical account of racial identity. Still, as it turns out, it is helpful to start from Du Bois's idea of the "badge of color."

RACIAL IDENTITY AND RACIAL IDENTIFICATION⁶

I have argued that Jefferson and Arnold thought that when they applied a racial label they were identifying people with a shared essence. I have argued, also, that they were wrong — and, I insist, not slightly but wildly wrong. Earlier in American history the label “African” was applied to many of those who would later be thought of as Negroes, by people who may have been under the impression that Africans had more in common culturally, socially, intellectually, and religiously than they actually did. Neither of these kinds of errors, however, stopped the labeling from having its effects. As slavery in North America became racialized in the colonial period, being identified as an African, or, later, as a Negro, carrying the “badge of color,” had those predictable negative consequences, which Du Bois so memorably captured in the phrase “the social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult.”

If we follow the badge of color from “African” to “Negro” to “colored race” to “black” to “Afro-American” (and this ignores such fascinating detours as the route by way of “Afro-Saxon”) we are thus tracing the history not only of a signifier, a label, but also a history of its effects. At any time in this history there was, within the American colonies and the United States that succeeded them, a massive consensus, both among those labeled black and among those labeled white, as to who, in their own communities, fell under which labels. (As immigration from China and other parts of the “Far East” occurred, an Oriental label came to have equal stability.) There was, no doubt, some “passing”; but the very concept of passing implies that, if the relevant fact about the ancestry of these individuals had become known, most people would have taken them to be traveling under the wrong badge.

The major North American exception was in southern Louisiana, where a different system in which an intermediary Creole group, neither white nor black, had social recognition; but *Plessy v. Ferguson* reflected the extent to which the Louisiana Purchase effectively brought even that state gradually into the American mainstream of racial classification. For in that case Homer Adolph Plessy — a Creole gentleman who could certainly have passed in most places for white — discovered in 1896, after a long process of appeal, that the Supreme Court of the United States proposed to treat him as a Negro and therefore recognize the State of Louisiana’s right to keep him and his white fellow citizens “separate but equal.”

The result is that there are at least three sociocultural objects in America — blacks, whites and Orientals — whose membership at any time is relatively, and increasingly, determinate. These objects are historical in this sense: to identify all the members of these American races over time, you cannot seek a single criterion that applies equally always; you can find the starting point for the race — the subcontinental source of the population of individuals that defines its initial membership — and then apply at each historical moment the criteria of intertemporal continuity that apply at that moment to decide which individuals in the next generation

count as belonging to the group. There is from the very beginning until the present, at the heart of the system, a simple rule that very few would dispute even today: where both parents are of a single race, the child is of the same race as the parents.

The criteria applicable at any time may leave vague boundaries. They certainly change, as the varying decisions about what proportion of African ancestry made one black or the current uncertainty as to how to assign the children of white-yellow "miscegenation" demonstrate. But they always definitely assign some people to the group and definitely rule out others; and for most of America's history the class of people about whom there was uncertainty (are the Florida Seminoles black or Indian?) was relatively small.⁷

Once the racial label is applied to people, ideas about what it refers to, ideas that may be much less consensual than the application of the label, come to have their social effects. But they have not only social effects but psychological ones as well; and they shape the ways people conceive of themselves and their projects. In particular, the labels can operate to shape what I want to call "identification": the process through which an individual intentionally shapes her projects — including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good — by reference to available labels, available identities.

Identification is central to what Ian Hacking has called "making up people."⁸ Drawing on a number of examples, but centrally homosexuality and multiple personality syndrome, he defends what he calls a "dynamic nominalism," which argues that "numerous kinds of human beings and human acts come into being hand in hand with our invention of the categories labeling them."⁹ I have just articulated a dynamic nominalism about a kind of person that is currently usually called "African-American."

Hacking reminds us of the philosophical truism, whose most influential formulation is in Elizabeth Anscombe's work on intention, that in intentional action people act "under descriptions"; that their actions are conceptually shaped. It follows, of course, that what people can do depends on what concepts they have available to them; and among the concepts that may shape one's action is the concept of a certain kind of person and the behavior appropriate to that kind.

Hacking offers as an example Sartre's brilliant evocation, in *Being and Nothingness*, of the Parisian *garçon de café*: "His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly, his eyes express an interest too solicitous for the order of the customer."¹⁰ Hacking comments:

Sartre's antihero chose to be a waiter. Evidently that was not a possible choice in other places, other times. There are servile people in most societies, and servants in many, but a waiter is something specific, and a *garçon de café* more specific. . . .

As with almost every way in which it is possible to be a person, it is possible to be a *garçon de café* only at a certain time, in a certain place, in a certain social setting. The feudal serf putting food on my lady's table can no more choose to be a *garçon de café* than he can choose to be lord of the manor. But the impossibility is evidently of a different kind.¹¹

The idea of the *garçon de café* lacks, so far as I can see, the sort of theoretical commitments that are trailed by the idea of the black and the white, the homosexual and the heterosexual. So it makes no sense to ask of someone who has a job as a *garçon de café* whether that is what he really is. The point is not that we do not have expectations of the *garçon de café*: that is why it is a recognizable identity. It is rather that those expectations are about the performance of the role; they depend on our assumption of intentional conformity to those expectations. As I spent some time arguing earlier, we *can* ask whether someone is really of a black race, because the constitution of this identity is generally theoretically committed: we expect people of a certain race to behave a certain way not simply because they are conforming to the script for that identity, performing that role, but because they have certain antecedent properties that are consequences of the label's properly applying to them. It is because ascription of racial identities — the process of applying the label to people, including ourselves — is based on more than intentional identification that there can be a gap between what a person ascriptively is and the racial identity he performs: it is this gap that makes passing possible.

Race is, in this way, like all the major forms of identification that are central to contemporary identity politics: female and male; gay, lesbian, and straight; black, white, yellow, red, and brown; Jewish-, Italian-, Japanese-, and Korean-American; even that most neglected of American identities, class. There is, in all of them, a set of theoretically committed criteria for ascription, not all of which are held by everybody, and which may not be consistent with one another even in the ascriptions of a single person; and there is then a process of identification in which the label shapes the intentional acts of (some of) those who fall under it.

It does not follow from the fact that identification shapes action, shapes life plans, that the identification itself must be thought of as voluntary. I don't recall ever choosing to identify as a male;¹²

but being male has shaped many of my plans and actions. In fact, where my ascriptive identity is one on which almost all my fellow citizens agree, I am likely to have little sense of choice about whether the identity is mine; though I *can* choose how central my identification with it will be — choose,

I DON'T RECALL EVER CHOOSING TO IDENTIFY AS A MALE, BUT BEING MALE HAS SHAPED MANY OF MY PLANS AND ACTIONS.

that is, how much I will organize my life around that identity. Thus if I am among those (like the unhappily labeled "straight-acting gay men," or most American Jews) who are able, if they choose, to escape ascription, I may

choose not to take up a gay or a Jewish identity; though this will require concealing facts about myself or my ancestry from others.

If, on the other hand, I fall into the class of those for whom the consensus on ascription is not clear — as among contemporary so-called biracials, or bisexuals, or those many white Americans of multiple identifiable ethnic heritages¹³ — I may have a sense of identity options: but one way I may exercise them is by marking myself ethnically (as when someone chooses to wear an Irish pin) so that others will then be more likely to ascribe that identity to me.

DIFFERENCES AMONG DIFFERENCES

Collective identities differ, of course, in lots of ways; the body is central to race, gender, and sexuality but not so central to class and ethnicity. And, to repeat an important point, racial identification is simply harder to resist than ethnic identification. The reason is twofold. First, racial ascription is more socially salient: unless you are morphologically atypical for your racial group, strangers, friends, officials are always aware of it in public and private contexts, always notice it, almost never let it slip from view. Second — and again both in intimate settings and in public space — race is taken by so many more people to be the basis for treating people differentially. (In this respect, Jewish identity in America strikes me as being a long way along a line toward African-American identity: there are ways of speaking and acting and looking — and it matters very little whether they are “really” mostly cultural or mostly genetic — that are associated with being Jewish; and there are many people, white and black, Jewish and Gentile, for whom this identity is a central force in shaping their responses to others.)

This much about identification said, we can see that Du Bois’s analytical problem was, in effect, that he believed that for racial labeling of this sort to have the obvious real effects that it did have — among them, crucially, his own identification with other black people and with Africa — there must be some real essence that held the race together. Our account of the history of the label reveals that this is a mistake: once we focus, as Du Bois almost saw, on the racial badge — the signifier rather than the signified, the word rather than the concept — we see both that the effects of the labeling are powerful and real and that false ideas, muddle and mistake and mischief, played a central role in determining both how the label was applied and to what purposes.

This, I believe, is why Du Bois so often found himself reduced, in his attempts to define race, to occult forces: if you look for a shared essence you won’t get anything, so you’ll come to believe you’ve missed it, because it is super-subtle, difficult to experience or identify: in short, mysterious. But if, as I say, you understand the sociohistorical process of construction of the race, you’ll see that the label works despite the absence of an essence.

Perhaps, then, we can allow that what Du Bois was after was the idea of racial identity, which I shall roughly define as a label, *R*, associated with

ascriptions by most people (where ascription involves descriptive criteria for applying the label); and *identifications* by those that fall under it (where identification implies a shaping role for the label in the intentional acts of the possessors, so that they sometimes act *as an R*), where there is a history of associating possessors of the label with an inherited racial essence (even if some who use the label no longer believe in racial essences).

In fact, we might argue that racial identities could persist even if nobody believed in racial essences, provided both ascription and identification continue.

There will be some who will object to my account that it does not give racism a central place in defining racial identity: it is obvious, I think, from the history I have explored, that racism has been central to the development of race theory. In that sense racism has been part of the story all along. But you might give an account of racial identity in which you counted nothing as a racial essence unless it implied a hierarchy among the races;¹⁴ or unless the label played a role in racist practices. I have some sympathy with the former strategy; it would fit easily into my basic picture. To the latter strategy, however, I make the philosopher's objection that it confuses logical and causal priority: I have no doubt that racial theories grew up, in part, as rationalizations for mistreating blacks, Jews, Chinese, and various others. But I think it is useful to reserve the concept of racism, as opposed to ethnocentrism or simply inhumanity, for practices in which a race concept plays a central role. And I doubt you can explain racism without first explaining the race concept.

I *am* in sympathy, however, with an animating impulse behind such proposals, which is to make sure that here in America we do not have discussions of race in which racism disappears from view. As I pointed out, racial identification is hard to resist in part because racial ascription by others is so insistent; and its effects — especially, but by no means exclusively, the racist ones — are so hard to escape. It is obvious, I think, that the persistence of racism means that racial ascriptions have negative consequences for some and positive consequences for others — creating, in particular, the white-skin privilege that it is so easy for people who have it to forget; and it is clear, too, that for those who suffer from the negative consequences, racial identification is a predictable response, especially where the project it suggests is that the victims of racism should join together to resist it. I shall return later to some of the important moral consequences of present racism and the legacy of racisms of the past.

But before I do, I want to offer some grounds for preferring the account of racial identity I have proposed, which places racial essences at its heart, over some newer accounts that see racial identity as a species of cultural identity.

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AN AGE OF MULTICULTURALISM

Most contemporary racial identification — whether it occurs in such obviously regressive forms as the white nationalism of the Aryan Nation or in

an Afrocentrism about which, I believe, a more nuanced position is appropriate — most naturally expresses itself in forms that adhere to modified (and sometimes unreconstructed) versions of the old racial essences. But the legacy of the Holocaust and the old racist biology has led many to be wary of racial essences and to replace them with cultural essences. Before I turn to my final cautionary words about racial identifications, I want to explore, for a moment, the substitution of cultures for races that has occurred in the movement for multiculturalism.

In my dictionary I find as a definition for “culture” “the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.”¹⁵ Like most dictionary definitions, this is, no doubt, a proposal on which one could improve. But it surely picks out a familiar constellation of ideas. That is, in fact, the sense in which anthropologists largely use the term nowadays. The culture of the Asante or the Zuni, for the anthropologist, includes every object they make — material culture — and everything they think and do.

The dictionary definition could have stopped there, leaving out the talk of “socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions” because these *are* all products of human work and thought. They are mentioned because they are the residue of an older idea of culture than the anthropological one; something more like the idea we might now express with the word “civilization”: the “socially transmitted behavior patterns” of ritual, etiquette, religion, games, arts; the values that they engender and reflect; and the institutions — family, school, church, state — that shape and are shaped by them.¹⁶ The habit of shaking hands at meetings belongs to culture in the anthropologist’s sense; the works of Sandro Botticelli and Martin Buber and Count Basie belong to culture also, but they belong to civilization as well.

There are tensions between the concepts of culture and of civilization. There is nothing, for example, that requires that an American culture should be a totality in any stronger sense than being the sum of all the things we make and do.

American civilization, on the other hand, would have to have a certain coherence. Some of what is done in America by Americans would not belong to American civilization because it was too individual (the particular bedtime rituals of a particular American family); some would not belong because it was not properly American, because (like a Hindi sentence, spoken in America) it does not properly cohere with the rest.

The second, connected, difference between culture and civilization is that the latter takes values to be more central to the enterprise, in two ways. First, civilization is centrally defined by moral and aesthetic values; and the coherence of a civilization is, primarily, the coherence of those values with each other and, then, of the group’s behavior and institutions with its values. Second, civilizations are essentially to be evaluated: they can be better and worse, richer and poorer, more and less interesting. Anthropologists, on the whole, tend now to avoid the relative evaluation of cultures, adopting a sort of cultural relativism, whose coherence

philosophers have tended to doubt. And they do not take values as more central to culture than, for example, beliefs, ideas, and practices.

The move from “civilization” to “culture” was the result of arguments. The move away from evaluation came first, once people recognized that much evaluation of other cultures by the Europeans and Americans who invented anthropology had been both ignorant and biased. Earlier criticisms of “lower” peoples turned out to involve crucial misunderstandings of their ideas; and it eventually seemed clear enough, too, that nothing more than differences of upbringing underlay the distaste of some Westerners for unfamiliar habits. It is a poor move from recognizing certain evaluations as mistaken to giving up evaluation altogether, and anthropologists who adopt cultural relativism often preach more than practice it. Still, this cultural relativism was a response to real errors. That it is the wrong response doesn’t make the errors any less erroneous.

The arguments against “civilization” were in place well before the midcentury. More recently, anthropologists began to see that the idea of the coherence of a civilization got in the way of understanding important facts about other societies (and, in the end, about our own). For even in some of the “simplest” societies, there are different values and practices and beliefs and interests associated with different social groups (for example, women as opposed to men). To think of a civilization as coherent was to miss the fact that these different values and beliefs were not merely different but actually opposed. Worse, what had been presented as the coherent unified worldview of a tribal people often turned out, on later inspection, to be merely the ideology of a dominant group or interest.

But the very idea of a coherent structure of beliefs and values and practices depends on a model of culture that does not fit our times — as we can see if we explore, for a moment, the ideal type of a culture where it might seem to be appropriate.

A COMMON CULTURE

There is an ideal — and thus to a certain extent imaginary — type of small-scale, technologically uncomplicated, face-to-face society, where most interactions are with people whom you know, that we call “traditional.” In such a society every adult who is not mentally disabled speaks the same language. All share a vocabulary and a grammar and an accent. While there will be some words in the language that are not known by everybody — the names of medicinal herbs, the language of some religious rituals — most are known to all normal adults. To share a language is to participate in a complex set of mutual expectations and understandings: but in such a society it is not only linguistic behavior that is coordinated through universally known expectations and understandings. People will share an understanding of many practices — marriages, funerals, other rites of passage — and will largely share their views about the general workings not only of the social but also of the natural world. Even those who are skeptical about particular elements of belief will nevertheless

know what everyone is supposed to believe, and they will know it in enough detail to behave very often as if they believed it, too.

A similar point applies to many of the values of such societies. It may well be that some people, even some groups, do not share the values that are enunciated in public and taught to children. But, once more, the standard values are universally known, and even those who do not share them know what it would be to act in conformity with them and probably do so much of the time.

In such a traditional society we may speak of these shared beliefs, values, signs, and symbols as the common culture; not, to insist on a crucial point, in the sense that everyone in the group actually holds the beliefs and values but in the sense that everybody knows what they are and everybody knows that they are widely held in the society.

Now, the citizens of one of those large "imagined communities" of modernity we call "nations" need not have, in this sense, a common culture. There is no single shared body of ideas and practices in India, or,

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to take another example, in most contemporary African states. And there is not now and there has never been a common culture in the United States, either. The reason is simple: the United States has always been multilingual, and has always had minorities who did not speak or understand

English. It has always had a plurality of religious traditions; beginning with American Indian religions and Puritans and Catholics and Jews and including now many varieties of Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Bahai, and so on. And many of these religious traditions have been quite unknown to one another. More than this, Americans have also always differed significantly even among those who do speak English, from North to South and East to West, and from country to city, in customs of greeting, notions of civility, and a whole host of other ways. The notion that what has held the United States together historically over its great geographical range is a common culture, like the common culture of my traditional society, is — to put it politely — not sociologically plausible.

The observation that there is no common American national culture will come as a surprise to many: observations about American culture, taken as a whole, are common. It is, for example, held to be individualist, litigious, racially obsessed. I think each of these claims is actually true, because what I mean when I say there is no common culture of the United States is not what is denied by someone who says that there is an American culture.

Such a person is describing large-scale tendencies within American life that are not necessarily participated in by all Americans. I do not mean to deny that these exist. But for such a tendency to be part of what I am calling the *common culture* they would have to derive from beliefs and values and practices (almost) universally shared and known to be so. And *that* they are not.

At the same time, it has also always been true that there was a dominant culture in these United States. It was Christian, it spoke English, and it identified with the high cultural traditions of Europe and, more particularly, of England. This dominant culture included much of the common culture of the dominant classes — the government and business and cultural elites — but it was familiar to many others who were subordinate to them. And it was not merely an effect but also an instrument of their domination.

The United States of America, then, has always been a society of many common cultures, which I will call, for convenience, sub-cultures (noting, for the record, that this is not the way the word is used in sociology).

It would be natural, in the current climate, with its talk of multiculturalism, to assume that the primary subgroups to which these subcultures are attached will be ethnic and racial groups (with religious denominations conceived of as a species of ethnic group). It would be natural, too, to think that the characteristic difficulties of a multicultural society arise largely from the cultural differences between ethnic groups. I think this easy assimilation of ethnic and racial subgroups to subcultures is to be resisted.

First of all, it needs to be argued, and not simply assumed, that black Americans, say, taken as a group, *have* a common culture: values and beliefs and practices that they share and that they do not share with others. This is equally true for, say, Chinese-Americans; and it is a fortiori true of white Americans. What seems clear enough is that being an African-American or an Asian-American or white is an important social identity in the United States. Whether these are important social identities because these groups have shared common cultures is, on the other hand, quite doubtful, not least because it is doubtful whether they *have* common cultures at all.

The issue is important because an analysis of America's struggle with difference as a struggle among cultures suggests a mistaken analysis of how the problems of diversity arise. With differing cultures, we might expect misunderstandings arising out of ignorance of each others' values, practices, and beliefs; we might even expect conflicts because of differing values or beliefs. The paradigms of difficulty in a society of many cultures are misunderstandings of a word or a gesture; conflicts over who should take custody of the children after a divorce; whether to go the doctor or to the priest for healing.

Once we move from talking of cultures to identities whole new kinds of problems come into view. Racial and ethnic identities are, for example, essentially contrastive and relate centrally to social and political power; in this way they are like genders and sexualities.

Now, it is crucial to understanding gender and sexuality that women and men and gay and straight people grow up together in families, communities, denominations. Insofar as a common culture means common beliefs, values, and practices, gay people and straight people in most

places have a common culture: and while there are societies in which the socialization of children is so structured by gender that women and men have seriously distinct cultures, this is not a feature of most “modern” societies. And it is perfectly possible for a black and a white American to grow up together in a shared adoptive family — with the same knowledge and values — and still grow into separate racial identities, in part because their experience outside the family, in public space, is bound to be racially differentiated.

I have insisted that we should distinguish between cultures and identities; but ethnic identities characteristically have cultural distinctions as one of their primary marks. That is why it is so easy to conflate them. Ethnic

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identities are created in family and community life. These — along with mass-mediated culture, the school, and the college — are, for most of us, the central sites of the social transmission of culture. Distinct practices, ideas, norms go with each ethnicity in part because people *want* to be ethnically distinct:

because many people want the sense of solidarity that comes from being unlike others. With ethnicity in modern society, it is often the distinct identity that comes first, and the cultural distinction that is created and maintained because of it — not the other way around. The distinctive common cultures of ethnic and religious identities matter not simply because of their contents but also as markers of those identities.

In the United States, not only ethnic but also racial boundaries are culturally marked. In *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*,¹⁷ Ruth Frankenberg records the anxiety of many white women who do not see themselves as white “ethnics” and worry, therefore, that they have no culture.¹⁸ This is somewhat puzzling in people who live, as every normal human being does, in rich structures of knowledge, experience, value and meaning; through tastes and practices: it is perplexing, in short, in people with normal human lives. But the reason these women do not recognize that they have a culture is because none of these things that actually make up their cultural lives are marked as white, as belonging specially to them: and the things that *are* marked as white (racism, white privilege) are things they want to repudiate. Many African-Americans, on the other hand, have cultural lives in which the ways they eat, the churches they go to, the music they listen to, and the ways they speak *are* marked as black: their identities are marked by cultural differences.

I have insisted that African-Americans do not have a single culture, in the sense of shared language, values, practices, and meanings. But many people who think of races as groups defined by shared cultures, conceive that sharing in a different way. They understand black people as sharing black culture *by definition*: jazz or hip-hop belongs to an African-American, whether she likes it or knows anything about it, because it is culturally marked as black. Jazz belongs to a black person who knows nothing about it more fully or naturally than it does to a white jazzman.

WHAT MATTERS ABOUT CULTURE: ARNOLD AGAIN

This view is an instance of what my friend Skip Gates has called "cultural geneticism."¹⁹ It has, in Bertrand Russell's wicked phrase, "the virtues of theft over honest toil." On this view, you earn rights to culture that is marked with the mark of your race — or your nation — simply by having a racial identity. For the old racialists, as we saw, your racial character was something that came with your essence; this new view recognizes that race does not bring culture, and generously offers, by the wave of a wand, to correct Nature's omission. It is as generous to whites as it is to blacks. Because Homer and Shakespeare are products of Western culture, they are awarded to white children who have never studied a word of them, never heard their names. And in this generous spirit the fact is forgotten that cultural geneticism deprives white people of jazz and black people of Shakespeare. This is a bad deal — as Du Bois would have insisted. "I sit with Shakespeare," the Bard of Great Barrington wrote, "and he winces not."

There is nothing in cultural geneticism of the ambition or the rigor of Matthew Arnold's conception, where culture is, as he says in *Culture and Anarchy*, "the disinterested and active use of reading, reflection and observation,"²⁰ and what is most valuable to us in culture, in the anthropological sense, is earned by intellectual labor, by self-cultivation. For Arnold, true culture is a process "which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit";²¹ whose aim is a "perfection in which characters of beauty and intelligence are both present, which unites, 'the two noblest of things,' — as Swift, who of one of the two, at any rate, had himself all too little, most happily calls them in his *Battle of the Books*, — 'the two noblest of things, sweetness and light.'"²²

Arnold's aim is not, in the proper sense, an elitist one: he believes that this cultivation is the proper aim of us all.

This is the *social idea*; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the *best* knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.²³

If you have this view of culture, you will think of cultural geneticism as the doctrine of the ignorant or the lazy, or at least of those who pander to them. And it is a view of culture whose adoption would diminish any society that seriously adopted it.

Not only is the conflation of identities and cultures mistaken, the view of cultural possession that underlies that error is the view of the Philistine, who, in Arnold's translation of Epictetus, makes "a great fuss about

exercise, a great fuss about eating, a great fuss about drinking, a great fuss about walking, a great fuss about riding. All these things ought to be done merely *by the way*: the formation of the spirit and character must be our real concern."²⁴

IDENTITIES AND NORMS

I have been exploring these questions about culture in order to show how unsatisfactory an account of the significance of race that mistakes identity for culture can be. But if this is the wrong route from identity to moral and political concerns, is there a better way?

We need to go back to the analysis of racial identities. While the theories on which ascription is based need not themselves be normative, these identities come with normative as well as descriptive expectations; about which, once more, there may be both inconsistency in the thinking of individuals and fairly widespread disagreement among them. There is, for example, a very wide range of opinions among American Jews as to what their being Jewish commits them to; and while most Gentiles probably don't think about the matter very much, people often make remarks that suggest they admire the way in which, as they believe, Jews have "stuck together," an admiration that seems to presuppose the moral idea that it is, if not morally obligatory, then at least morally desirable, for those who share identities to take responsibility for each other. (Similar comments have been made increasingly often about Korean-Americans.)

We need, in short, to be clear that the relation between identities and moral life are complex. In the liberal tradition, to which I adhere, we see public morality as engaging each of us as individuals with our individual "identities": and we have the notion, which comes (as Charles Taylor has

rightly argued)²⁵ from the ethics of authenticity, that, other things being equal, people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already really are. It is because someone is already authentically Jewish or gay that we deny them something in requiring them to hide this fact, to "pass," as we say, for something that they are not. Charles Taylor has suggested that we call the political issues raised by this fact the politics of recognition: a politics that asks us to acknowledge socially and politically the authentic identities of others.

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As has often been pointed out, however, the way much discussion of recognition proceeds is strangely at odds with the individualist thrust of talk of authenticity and identity. If what matters about me is my individual and authentic self, why is so much contemporary talk of identity about large categories — race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality — that seem so far from individual? What is the relation between this collective language

and the individualist thrust of the modern notion of the self? How has social life come to be so bound up with an idea of identity that has deep roots in romanticism with its celebration of the individual over against society?²⁶

The connection between individual identity, on the one hand, and race and other collective identities, on the other, seems to be something like this: each person's individual identity is seen as having two major dimensions. There is a collective dimension, the intersection of her collective identities; and there is what I will call a personal dimension, consisting of other socially or morally important features of the person — intelligence, charm, wit, cupidity — that are not themselves the basis of forms of collective identity.

The distinction between these two dimensions of identity is, so to speak, a sociological rather than a logical distinction. In each dimension we are talking about properties that are important for social life. But only the collective identities count as social categories, kinds of person. There is a logical category but no social category of the witty, or the clever, or the charming, or the greedy: people who share these properties do not constitute a social group, in the relevant sense. The concept of authenticity is central to the connection between these two dimensions; and there is a problem in many current understandings of that relationship, a misunderstanding one can find, for example, in Charles Taylor's recent (brilliant) essay *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*.

AUTHENTICITY

Taylor captures the ideal of authenticity in a few elegant sentences: "There is a certain way of being that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way. . . . If I am not [true to myself], I miss the point of my life."²⁷ To elicit the problem, here, let me start with a point Taylor makes in passing about Herder: "I should note here that Herder applied his concept of originality at two levels, not only to the individual person among other persons, but also to the culture-bearing people among other peoples. Just like individuals, a Volk should be true to itself, that is, its own culture."²⁸ It seems to me that in this way of framing the issue less attention than necessary is paid to the connection between the originality of persons and of nations. After all, in many places nowadays, the individual identity, whose authenticity screams out for recognition, is likely to have an ethnic identity (which Herder would have seen as a national identity) as a component of its collective dimension. It is, among other things, my being, say, an African-American that shapes the authentic self that I seek to express.²⁹ And it is, in part, because I seek to express my self that I seek recognition of an African-American identity. This is the fact that makes problems: for recognition as an African-American means social acknowledgment of that collective identity, which requires not just recognizing its existence but actually demonstrating respect for it. If, in understanding myself as African-American, I see myself as resisting white norms, mainstream

American conventions, the racism (and, perhaps, the materialism or the individualism) of "white culture," why should I at the same time seek recognition from these white others?

There is, in other words, at least an irony in the way in which an ideal — you will recognize it if I call it the bohemian ideal — in which authenticity requires us to reject much that is conventional in our society is turned around and made the basis of a "politics of recognition."

Irony is not the bohemian's only problem. It seems to me that this notion of authenticity has built into it a series of errors of philosophical anthropology. It is, first of all, wrong in failing to see what Taylor so clearly recognizes, namely the way in which the self is, as he says, dialogically constituted. The rhetoric of authenticity proposes not only that I have a way of being that is all my own but that in developing it I must fight against the family, organized religion, society, the school, the state — all the forces of convention. This is wrong, however, not only because it is in dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity (Charles Taylor's point) but also because my identity is crucially constituted through concepts (and practices) made available to me by religion, society, school, and state, and mediated to varying degrees by the family (Hacking's point about "making up people"). Dialogue shapes the identity I develop as I grow up: but the very material out of which I form it is provided, in part, by my society, by what Taylor calls its language in "a broad sense."³⁰ I shall borrow and extend Taylor's term "monological" here to describe views of authenticity that make these connected errors.

I used the example of African-Americans just now, and it might seem that this complaint cannot be lodged against an American black nationalism: African-American identity, it might be said, is shaped by African-American society, culture, and religion. "It is dialogue with these black others that shapes the black self; it is from these black contexts that the concepts through which African-Americans shape themselves are derived. The white society, the white culture, over against which an African-American nationalism of the counterconventional kind poses itself, is therefore not part of what shapes the collective dimension of the individual identities of black people in the United States."

This claim is simply wrong. And what shows it is wrong is the fact that it is in part a recognition of a black identity by "white society" that is demanded by nationalism of this form. And "recognition" here means what Taylor means by it, not mere acknowledgment of one's existence. African-American identity, as I have argued, is centrally shaped by American society and institutions: it cannot be seen as constructed solely within African-American communities. African-American culture, if this means shared beliefs, values, practices, does not exist: what exists are African-American cultures, and though these are created and sustained in large measure by African-Americans, they cannot be understood without reference to the bearers of other American racial identities.

There is, I think, another error in the standard framing of authenticity as an ideal, and that is the philosophical realism (which is nowadays usually called "essentialism") that seems inherent in the way questions of authenticity are normally posed. Authenticity speaks of the real self buried in there, the self one has to dig out and express. It is only later, after romanticism, that the idea develops that one's self is something that one creates, makes up, so that every life should be an artwork whose creator is, in some sense, his or her own greatest creation. (This is, I suppose, an idea one of whose sources is Oscar Wilde; but it is surely very close to the self-cultivation that Arnold called "culture.")

Of course, neither the picture in which there is just an authentic nugget of selfhood, the core that is distinctively me, waiting to be dug out, nor the notion that I can simply make up any self I choose, should tempt us. We make up selves from a tool kit of options made available by our culture and society — in ways that I pointed out earlier. We do make choices, but we don't determine the options among which we choose.³¹

If you agree with this, you will wonder how much of authenticity we should acknowledge in our political morality: and that will depend, I suppose, on whether an account of it can be developed that is neither essentialist nor monological.

It would be too large a claim that the identities that claim recognition in the multicultural chorus *must* be essentialist and monological. But it seems to me that one reasonable ground for suspicion of much contemporary multicultural talk is that the conceptions of collective identity they presuppose are indeed remarkably unsubtle in their understandings of the processes by which identities, both individual and collective, develop. The story I have told for African-American identity has a parallel for other collective identities: in all of them, I would argue, false theories play a central role in the application of the labels; in all of them the story is complex, involves "making up people," and cannot be explained by an appeal to an essence.

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BEYOND IDENTITY

The large collective identities that call for recognition come with notions of how a proper person of that kind behaves: it is not that there is *one* way that blacks should behave, but that there are proper black modes of behavior. These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping the life plans of those who make these collective identities central to their individual identities; of the identifications of those who fly under these banners.³² Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life

plans and in telling their life stories. In our society (though not, perhaps, in the England of Addison and Steele) being witty does not in this way suggest the life script of "the wit." And that is why what I called the personal dimensions of identity work differently from the collective ones.

This is not just a point about modern Westerners: cross-culturally it matters to people that their lives have a certain narrative unity; they want to be able to tell a story of their lives that makes sense. The story — my story — should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling that story, how

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I fit into the wider story of various collectivities is, for most of us, important. It is not just gender identities that give shape (through, for example, rites of passage into woman- or manhood) to one's life: ethnic and national identities too fit each individual story into a larger narrative. And some of the most "individualist" of individuals value such things. Hobbes spoke of the desire for glory as one of the dominating impulses of human

beings, one that was bound to make trouble for social life. But glory can consist in fitting and being seen to fit into a collective history: and so, in the name of glory, one can end up doing the most social things of all.

How does this general idea apply to our current situation in the multicultural West? We live in societies in which certain individuals have not been treated with equal dignity because they were, for example, women, homosexuals, blacks, Catholics. Because, as Taylor so persuasively argues, our identities are dialogically shaped, people who have these characteristics find them central — often, negatively central — to their identities. Nowadays there is a widespread agreement that the insults to their dignity and the limitations of their autonomy imposed in the name of these collective identities are seriously wrong. One form of healing of the self that those who have these identities participate in is learning to see these collective identities not as sources of limitation and insult but as a valuable part of what they centrally are. Because the ethics of authenticity requires us to express what we centrally are in our lives, they move next to the demand that they be recognized in social life as women, homosexuals, blacks, Catholics. Because there was no good reason to treat people of these sorts badly, and because the culture continues to provide degrading images of them nevertheless, they demand that we do cultural work to resist the stereotypes, to challenge the insults, to lift the restrictions.

These old restrictions suggested life scripts for the bearers of these identities, but they were negative ones. In order to construct a life with dignity, it seems natural to take the collective identity and construct positive life scripts instead.

An African-American after the Black Power movement takes the old script of self-hatred, the script in which he or she is a nigger, and works, in community with others, to construct a series of positive black life

scripts. In these life scripts, being a Negro is recoded as being black: and this requires, among other things, refusing to assimilate to white norms of speech and behavior. And if one is to be black in a society that is racist then one has constantly to deal with assaults on one's dignity. In this context, insisting on the right to live a dignified life will not be enough. It will not even be enough to require that one be treated with equal dignity despite being black: for that will require a concession that being black counts naturally or to some degree against one's dignity. And so one will end up asking to be respected *as a black*.

I hope I seem sympathetic to this story. I *am* sympathetic. I see how the story goes. It may even be historically, strategically necessary for the story to go this way.³³ But I think we need to go on to the next necessary step, which is to ask whether the identities constructed in this way are ones we can all be happy with in the longer run. What demanding respect for people *as blacks* or *as gays* requires is that there be some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay: there will be expectations to be met; demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like not to have to choose. I would like other options. The politics of recognition requires that one's skin color, one's sexual body, should be politically acknowledged in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and their sexual body as personal dimensions of the self. And "personal" doesn't mean "secret" but "not too tightly scripted," "not too constrained by the demands and expectations of others."

**IF I HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
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OTHER OPTIONS.**

In short, so it seems to me, those who see potential for conflict between individual freedom and the politics of identity are right.

WHY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS MATTER

But there is a different kind of worry about racial identities; one that has not to do with their being too tightly scripted but with a consequence of their very existence for social life. We can approach the problem by asking why differences between groups matter.

This is, I think, by no means obvious. If some minority groups — Korean-Americans, say — do especially well, most people feel, "More power to them." We worry, then, about the minorities that fail. And the main reason why people currently worry about minorities that fail is that group failure may be evidence of injustice to individuals. That is the respectable reason why there is so much interest in hypotheses, like those of Murray

and Herrnstein, that suggest a different diagnosis. But let us suppose that we can get rid of what we might call Sowellian discrimination: discrimination, that is, as understood by Thomas Sowell, which is differential treatment based on false (or perhaps merely unwarranted) beliefs about the different average capacities of racial groups.³⁴

Even without Sowellian discrimination socioeconomic disparities between groups threaten the fairness of our social arrangements. This issue can be kept clear only if we look at the matter from the point of view of an individual. Suppose I live in a society with two groups, blacks and whites. Suppose that, for whatever reason, the black group to which I obviously belong scores averagely low on a test that is genuinely predictive of job performance. Suppose the test is expensive. And suppose I would have, in fact, a high score on this test and that I would, in fact, perform well.³⁵ In these circumstances it may well be economically rational for an employer, knowing what group I belong to, simply not to give me the test, and thus not to hire me.³⁶ The employer has acted in a rational fashion; there is no Sowellian discrimination here. But most people will understand me if I say that I feel that this outcome is unfair. One way of putting the unfairness is to say, "What I can do and be with my talents is being held back because others, over whose failings I have no control, happen to have the characteristics they do."

Capitalism — like life — is full of such unfairness: luck — from lotteries to hurricanes — affects profit. And we can't get rid of all unfairness; for if we had perfect insurance, zero risk, there'd be no role for entrepreneurship, no markets, no capitalism. But we do think it proper to mitigate some risks. We think, for example, that we should do something about bad luck when it has large negative effects on individual people, or if it forces them below some socioeconomic baseline — we insure for car accidents, death, loss of home; the government helps those ruined by large-scale acts of God. We don't worry much about the chance production of small negative effects on individuals, even large numbers of individuals.

It is at least arguable that in our society the cost to competent, well-behaved individual blacks and Hispanics³⁷ of being constantly treated as if they have to measure up — the cost in stress, in anger, in lost opportunities — is pretty high.³⁸ It would be consistent with a general attitude of wanting to mitigate risks with large negative consequences for individuals to try to do something about it.³⁹

This specific sort of unfairness — where a person is atypically competent in a group that is averagely less competent — is the result, among other things, of the fact that jobs are allocated by a profit-driven economy and the fact that I was born into a group in which I am atypical. The latter fact may or may not be the consequence of policies adopted by this society. Let's suppose it isn't: so society isn't, so to speak, causally responsible. According to some — for example, Thomas Sowell, again — that means it isn't morally responsible, either: you don't have to fix what you didn't break.

I'm not so sure. First, we can take collective responsibility, "as a society," for harms we didn't cause; as is recognized in the Americans with Disabilities Act. But second, the labor market is, after all, an institution: in a modern society it is kept in place by such arrangements as the laws of contract, the institution of money, laws creating and protecting private property, health and safety at work, and equal employment laws. Sowell may disapprove of some of these, but he can't disapprove of all of them; without all of them, there'd be no capitalism. So the outcome is the result not only of my bad luck but of its interaction with social arrangements, which could be different.

Thus once we grasp the unfairness of this situation, people might feel that something should be done about it. One possible thing would be to try to make sure there were no ethnic minorities significantly below norm in valuable skills. If the explanation for most significant differences between groups is not hereditary, this could be done, in part, by adopting policies that discouraged significant ethnic differentiation, which would gradually produce assimilation to a single cultural norm. Or it could be done by devoting resources most actively to the training of members of disadvantaged groups.

Another — more modest — move would be to pay special attention to finding talented members of minority groups who would not be found when employers were guided purely by profit.

A third — granted once more that the differences in question are not largely hereditary — would be to explore why there are such differences and to make known to people ways of giving themselves or their children whatever aptitudes will maximize their life chances, given their hereditary endowments.

Fourth, and finally, for those differences that were hereditary it would be possible to do research to seek to remedy the initial distribution by the genetic lottery — as we have done in making it possible for those without natural resistance to live in areas where malaria and yellow fever are endemic.

Each of these strategies would cost something, and the costs would be not only financial. Many people believe that the global homogenization of culture impoverishes the cultural fabric of our lives. It is a sentiment, indeed, we find in Arnold: "My brother Saxons have, as is well known, a terrible way with them of wanting to improve everything but themselves off the face of the earth; I have no passion for finding nothing but myself everywhere; I like variety to exist and to show itself to me, and I would not for the world have the lineaments of the Celtic genius lost."⁴⁰ The first strategy — of cultural assimilation — would undoubtedly escalate that process. And all these strategies would require more knowledge than we now have to apply in actual cases so as to guarantee their success. Anyone who shares my sense that there is an unfairness here to be met, an unfairness that has something to do with the idea that what matters is individual merit, should be interested in developing that kind of knowledge.

But I want to focus for a moment on a general effect of these four strategies. They would all produce a population less various in some of the respects that make a difference to major socioeconomic indicators. This would not mean that everybody would be the same as everybody else — but it could lead to a more recreational conception of racial identity. It would make African-American identity more like Irish-American identity is for most of those who care to keep the label. And that would allow us to resist one persistent feature of ethnoracial identities: that they risk becoming the obsessive focus, the be-all and end-all, of the lives of those who identify with them. They lead people to forget that their individual identities are complex and multifarious — that they have enthusiasms that do not flow from their race or ethnicity, interests and tastes that cross ethnoracial boundaries, that they have occupations or professions, are fans of clubs and groups. And they then lead them, in obliterating the identities they share with people outside their

**COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES
HAVE A TENDENCY, IF I MAY COIN A
PHRASE, TO "GO IMPERIAL."**

race or ethnicity, away from the possibility of identification with Others. Collective identities have a tendency, if I may coin a phrase, to "go imperial," dominating not only people of other identities, but the other identities, whose shape is exactly what makes

each of us what we individually and distinctively are.

In policing this imperialism of identity — an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else — it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics, mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism — and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go — let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies.

IN CONCLUSION

Much of what I have had to say in this essay will, no doubt, seem negative. It is true that I have defended an analytical notion of racial identity, but I have gone to worry about too hearty an endorsement of racial identification. Let me quote Matthew Arnold again, for the last time: "I thought, and I still think, that in this [Celtic] controversy, as in other controversies, it is most desirable both to believe and to profess that the work of construction is the fruitful and important work, and that we are demolishing only to prepare for it."⁴¹ So here are my positive proposals: live with fractured

identities; engage in identity play; find solidarity, yes, but recognize contingency, and, above all, practice irony.⁴² In short I have only the proposals of a banal "postmodernism." And there is a regular response to these ideas from those who speak for the identities that now demand recognition, identities toward which so many people have struggled in dealing with the obstacles created by sexism, racism, homophobia. "It's all very well for you. You academics live a privileged life; you have steady jobs; solid incomes; status from your place in maintaining cultural capital. Trifle with your own identities, if you like; but leave mine alone."

To which I answer only: my job as an intellectual is to call it as I see it. I owe my fellow citizens respect, certainly, but not a feigned acquiescence. I have a duty to reflect on the probable consequences of what I say; and then, if I still think it worth saying, to accept responsibility for them. If I am wrong, I say, you do not need to plead that I should tolerate error for the sake of human liberation; you need only correct me. But if I am right, so it seems to me, there is a work of the imagination that we need to begin.

And so I look forward to taking up, along with others, the fruitful imaginative work of constructing collective identities for a democratic nation in a world of democratic nations; work that must go hand in hand with cultivating democracy here and encouraging it everywhere else. About the identities that will be useful in this project, let me say only this: the identities we need will have to recognize *both* the centrality of difference within human identity *and* the fundamental moral unity of humanity.

NOTES

¹ This claim was prompted by G. Spiller, ed., *Papers in Inter-Racial Problems Communicated to the First Universal Races Congress Held at the University of London, July 26-29, 1911* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1911). Republished with an introduction by H. Aptheker (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1970). [All notes are Appiah's.]

² W.E.B. Du Bois, "Races," in *Writings in Periodicals Edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, Vol. 1, 1911-1925*, compiled and edited by Herbert Aptheker (Milwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1983), p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴ "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," reprinted from *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985). In *"Race," Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 21-37. Lucius Outlaw has remonstrated with me about this in the past; these rethinkings are prompted largely by discussion with him.

⁵ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940). Reprinted with introduction by Herbert Aptheker (Milwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1975), pp. 116-17.

⁶ I am conscious here of having been pushed to rethink my views by Stuart Hall's Du Bois lectures at Harvard in the spring of 1994, which began with a nuanced critique of my earlier work on Du Bois's views.

⁷ See Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech University Press, 1993).

⁸ Ian Hacking, "Making Up People" reprinted from *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas Heller, Morton Sousa, and David Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), in *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy*, ed. Edward Stein (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 69-88 (page references are to this version).

⁹ Hacking, "Making Up People," p. 87.

¹⁰ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹² That I don't recall it doesn't *prove* that I didn't, of course.

¹³ See Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁴ This is the proposal of a paper on metaphysical racism by Berel Lang at the New School for Social Research seminar "Race and Philosophy" in October 1994, from which I learned much.

¹⁵ *American Heritage Dictionary III for DOS* (3d ed.) (Novato, Calif.: Word-star International Incorporated, 1993).

¹⁶ The distinction between culture and civilization I am marking is not one that would have been thus marked in nineteenth-century ethnography or (as we would now say) social anthropology: culture and civilization were basically synonyms, and they were both primarily used in the singular. The distinctions I am making draw on what I take to be the contemporary resonances of these two words. If I had more time, I would explore the history of the culture concept the sort of way we have explored "race."

¹⁷ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁸ The discussion of this work is shaped by conversation with Larry Blum, Martha Minow, David Wilkins, and David Wong.

¹⁹ Gates means the notion to cover thinking in terms of cultural patrimony quite generally, not just in the case of race. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Loose Canons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Samuel Lipman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 119.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 48. The phrase "sweetness and light" is from Jonathan Swift's *Battle of the Books* (1697). The contest between the ancients (represented there by the bee) and the moderns (represented by the spider) is won by the ancients, who provide, like the bee, both honey and wax — sweetness and light. Sweetness is, then, aesthetic, and light intellectual, perfection.

²⁴ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 36.

²⁵ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition."* With commentary by Amy Gutmann, ed., K. Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁶ Taylor reminds us rightly of Trilling's profound contributions to our understanding of this history. I discuss Trilling's work in chap. 4 of *In My Father's House*.

²⁷ Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, p. 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁹ And, for Herder, this would be a paradigmatic national identity.

³⁰ The broad sense "cover[s]" not only the words we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the 'languages' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like" (p. 32).

³¹ This is too simple, too, for reasons captured in Anthony Giddens's many discussions of "duality of structure."

³² I say "make" here not because I think there is always conscious attention to the shaping of life plans or a substantial experience of choice but because I want to stress the antiesentialist point that there are choices that can be made.

³³ Compare what Sartre wrote in his "Orphée Noir," in *Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malagache de Langue Française*, ed. L. S. Senghor, p. xiv. Sartre argued, in effect, that this move is a necessary step in a dialectical progression. In this passage he explicitly argues that what he calls an "antiracist racism" is a path to the "final unity . . . the abolition of differences of race."

³⁴ "Once the possibility of economic performance differences between groups is admitted, then differences in income, occupational 'representation,' and the like do not, in themselves, imply that decision-makers took race or ethnicity into account. However, in other cases, group membership may in fact be used as a proxy for economically meaningful variables, rather than reflecting either mistaken prejudices or even subjective affinities and animosities." Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), p. 114.

³⁵ You need both these conditions, because a high score on a test that correlates well for some skill doesn't necessarily mean you will perform well. And, in fact, Sowell discusses the fact that the same IQ score predicts different levels of economic success for different ethnic groups; *ibid.*, pp. 173, 182.

³⁶ Knowing this, I might offer to pay myself, if I had the money: but that makes the job worth less to me than to members of the other groups. So I lose out again.

³⁷ Let me explicitly point out that many of these people are not middle-class.

³⁸ I actually think that there is still rather more Sowellian discrimination than Sowell generally acknowledges; but that is another matter.

³⁹ It will seem to some that I've avoided an obvious argument here, which is that the inequalities in resources that result from differences in talents under capitalism need addressing. I agree. But the argument I am making here is meant to appeal to only extremely unradical individualist ideas; it's designed not to rely on arguing for egalitarian outcomes directly.

⁴⁰ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature and on Translating Homer* (New York: MacMillan, 1883), p. 11.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁴² See, for example, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and my review of it: "Metaphys. Ed.," *Village Voice*, September 19, 1989, p. 55.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Appiah's essay is a reader-friendly one — that is, it goes out of its way to address, engage, anticipate, and assist its readers. This engagement is a *technical* feat; it is a strategy. It is the result of something Appiah *does* as a writer. His work suggests strategies that you, too, could adopt and use.

Take note, for example, of the ways in which Appiah punctuates the text. Punctuation is often discussed in relation to the sentence. Writers use marks of punctuation (commas, dashes, colons, semicolons, parentheses) to organize sentences and to help readers locate themselves in relation to what they are reading. Writers also punctuate longer units of text, such as essays or chapters. Appiah's text provides an excellent model of this practice. You can notice immediately how he uses white space and subheadings to organize the essay into sections.

There are also, however, many moments when Appiah speaks as a writer about the text he is writing (and that you are reading). He does this to remind you (and perhaps himself) where you have been and where you are going in relation to this long piece of writing. Here are some examples:

For reasons I shall be able to make clear only when I have given my account, Du Bois's own approach is somewhat misleading. So instead of proceeding with exegesis of Du Bois, I must turn next to the task of shaping a sociohistorical account of racial identity. (p. 38)

There will be some who will object to my account that it does not give racism a central place in defining racial identity. (p. 43)

I shall return later to some of the important moral consequences of present racism and the legacy of racisms of the past. (p. 43)

But before I do, I want to offer some grounds for preferring the account of racial identity I have proposed, which places racial essences at its heart, over some newer accounts that see racial identity as a species of cultural identity. (p. 43)

I have been exploring these questions about culture in order to show how unsatisfactory an account of the significance of race that mistakes identity for culture can be. But if this is the wrong route from identity to moral and political concerns, is there a better way? (p. 50)

As you reread the text, take note of the places where Appiah is punctuating his essay — places where Appiah, as a writer, seems to have you, his reader, in mind.

2. Although this is a reader-friendly text, it is also a learned text. It contains casual references to writers and scholars whom you may not recognize: W. E. B. Du Bois, Ian Hacking, Matthew Arnold, Charles Taylor, Thomas Sowell — to list just a few. Using the Internet as well as the library (so that you can put your hands on books and scholarly journals) and perhaps working in a group, create brief glosses on some of these writers and their work. Who are they? What are their concerns? And why might they be useful or interesting or important to Appiah?
3. We asked that you pay special attention to voice during your first reading of this essay. Remember that Appiah does not necessarily agree with all of the affirmative statements he makes — in many instances, he is instead exploring the potential consequences of a particular thought process or contention. In other instances, though, Appiah shifts back into his own voice and speaks for himself.

Here, for example, is a moment when Appiah acknowledges the twists and turns of his methods. He has come to this position: “The notion that what has held the United States together historically over its great geographical range is a common culture . . . is — to put it politely — not sociologically plausible.” He goes on:

The observation that there is no common American national culture will come as a surprise to many: observations about American culture, taken as a whole, are common. It is, for example, held to be individualist, litigious, racially obsessed. I think each of these claims is actually true, because what I mean when I say there is no common culture of the United States is not what is denied by someone who says that there is an American culture. (p. 46)

As you reread, chart the moments when Appiah takes on (speaks from within) someone else’s way of thinking and speaking. Also chart the moments when you feel he is finally speaking for himself. How do you know? When and where is Appiah most likely to come forward and to speak for himself?

4. In each section of his essay, Appiah works with key terms. He is the sort of philosopher who believes that in order to think better, we need to have a better command of our words, of the language we use to articulate what

we know. Here are some clusters of terms from the essay: *identity, identification, racial identity, racial identification, collective identities; culture, common culture, multiculturalism, civilization; narratives, scripts, life stories, authenticity; the politics of recognition, the politics of identity; freedom, tyranny, democracy.*

As you reread, take a particular term (or cluster of terms) that seems interesting, important, or compelling, and follow Appiah's use of this term (or cluster) through one of the subsections of the essay. Then, write a brief paragraph of translation. It could begin something like this: "In the section titled 'Cultural Identity in an Age of Multiculturalism,' Appiah talks about culture and civilization, and this is what I think he is trying to say . . ." You might conclude: "This is important to him because . . ."

5. As he prepares for the final section of his essay, Appiah offers a surprising list:

In policing this imperialism of identity — an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else — it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics; mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism — and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go — let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies. (p. 58)

A list like that is a generous gesture. It invites additions; it invites *you* to join in. It is also a leveling gesture — Jewish or Christian, gay or straight, poets and pet-lovers, Padres and Bruins: all of these identity markers have equal status.

This long list is an invitation to, as Appiah advises, "engage in identity play." Retype the first part of the sentence, the words up to the "but" clause ("but that we are also . . ."), and then prepare your list. Your list should be a distinctive one that represents the range of identifications you might offer as working terms of identity. Think of the list as something you would present to the rest of the class.

When you are done with that sentence, take a minute to think about what your list represents — what it represents as an act, as a way of enacting as well as thinking about the "fruitful imaginative work of constructing collective identities for a democratic nation" (p. 59). Write out a short paragraph that you might offer as a response to Appiah's conclusion.

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. What might be the consequences of Appiah's argument? If, as a mental exercise (or because you are convinced), you follow Appiah's line of thought, what effects might this have on the ways you (or "we") think, act, speak, and write? What might change? How?

These questions offer a way to begin thinking about an essay. If you choose to write this essay, here is one approach to writing it.

Choose one or two of the essay's subsections and let them represent a line of argument. (Because the essay is long and complicated, it is difficult to work with in its entirety.) You'll need to bring this argument to your readers — smart people, but people who have not yet read "Racial Identities." To present Appiah's line of thinking, use a combination of summary, paraphrase, and block quotation. If you want to make reference to the shape of the entire essay, do so only in two or three sentences. Focus on the details in the subsection (or subsections) you have chosen as your point of focus.

Then, to make this project your project, and to make it an intellectual project (and not just a rehearsal of received opinion or an "I have a dream" speech), you will need to think carefully about something (an example, most likely) that you can bring to the discussion, something you can bring into conversation with the examples provided by Appiah. Think about this. The choice is important. For ideas, look to your reading (or viewing or listening), to your immediate experience, to the current institutional, political, or cultural scenes where you are or have been a player — look to situations that you know well.

Your account of Appiah's thinking will certainly be important to what you write, but equally important will be the example you provide. Your example will allow you to focus your attention to racial thinking as it is (or has been) most crucially and most interestingly present to you and to your generation or cohorts, to the people for whom you feel authorized to speak.

2. Consider this passage from "Racial Identities":

Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories. In our society (though not, perhaps, in the England of Addison and Steele) being witty does not in this way suggest the life script of "the wit." And that is why what I called the personal dimensions of identity work differently from the collective ones.

This is not just a point about modern Westerners: cross-culturally it matters to people that their lives have a certain narrative unity; they want to be able to tell a story of their lives that makes sense. The story — my story — should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling that story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectivities is, for most of us, important. (pp. 53–54)

Your project in this assignment is to consider the terms, the stages, the conclusions, and the consequences of Appiah's argument in his essay "Racial Identities." If, as a mental exercise (or because you are convinced), you accept Appiah's notion that "[c]ollective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories" (pp. 53–54), how might you tell a story that places yourself in relation to the available scripts, to the life stories available to a person like you — a person of your culture (or collectivity), a person of your age, now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

You are not required to write in the genre of the memoir (as though you were writing a chapter of your autobiography), but many find that doing so is an inviting way to begin. What a reader wants is a view of you and your world, not in the pen-pal sense of what you look like or what you prefer in music, but with the goal of understanding something more general, something about people like you, something about what it is that shapes and defines a person or an identity in this place and at this point in time. In Appiah's terms, your writing will negotiate the competing demands of a life and a "script," of the personal and the collective, of individual freedom and the politics of identity.

We are trying to avoid the word *essay* in describing this project, since that word carries certain generic restrictions. Our advice is for you to begin not with a generalization but with some specific scene or scenes. Begin with a story (or stories) rather than with an argument. If people are speaking, you may choose to let them speak as characters speak in fiction. You may write in the first person if you find it helpful to do so.

3. In the final section of his essay, "In Conclusion," Appiah says, "So here are my positive proposals: live with fractured identities; engage in identity play; find solidarity, yes, but recognize contingency, and, above all, practice irony" (pp. 58–59).

What might it mean to live a life in these terms? Write an essay in which you present Appiah's conclusion to readers (smart readers, interested readers) who have not yet read Appiah's essay. Where do these positive proposals come from? What is at stake in putting them into play? Why does Appiah express them with such urgency?

Write an essay in which you present Appiah's conclusions but where you also extend those conclusions to consider the contexts within which you hear and receive these proposals. Who else is telling you how to live your life? What advice is being provided to you? Where and by whom? What examples of appropriate conduct are offered to you by the culture — in books or movies, in magazines, or online? What forms of advice do you listen to or seek out? What uses or contexts can you imagine for words or phrases like *fractured identities*, *identity play*, *contingency*, and *irony*?

Appiah says, "If I am wrong, . . . you need only correct me. But if I am right, so it seems to me, there is a work of the imagination that we need to begin" (p. 59). With some particular examples in mind, what might you say in turn?

 MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Both John Edgar Wideman's "Our Time" (p. 603) and Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities" call attention to the difficulties of representing and understanding the experience of those whom we call "African Americans"—the difficulty of telling their story, of getting it right, of recovering experience from the representations of others.

Write an essay in which you represent these two texts as examples of writers working on a problem that has a particular urgency for all Americans, not just black Americans. How might you name this problem? What do you find compelling in each of these approaches to the problem? And what might this problem have to do with you—as a writer, a thinker, a person, and a citizen?

2. Both Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities" and Ruth Behar's "The Vulnerable Observer" (p. 109) have distinctive styles, voices, and methods. A character emerges in each essay, a figure representing one version of a well-schooled, learned, and articulate adult, an intellectual—someone who reads widely and thinks closely, freshly, and methodically about big questions; someone with ideas and with style; someone who is defined in relation to sources, to books, and other writers; and someone who takes pains to engage his or her readers. This is an intellectual, then, who has a desire to reach others, to address them, to bring them into his or her point of view.

Write an essay in which you discuss the figure of the intellectual represented in these two essays. You'll need to work closely with a few key and representative moments in the texts. Your essay should assess this figure in relation to your own education—better yet, in relation to the kind of figure you intend to cut as a well-schooled adult, as an intellectual, as a person with ideas and knowledge and something to say.

3. As he prepares for the final section of his essay, Kwame Anthony Appiah offers a surprising list to counter what he refers to as the "imperialism of identity":

In policing this imperialism of identity—an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else—it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics, mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism—and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go—let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies. (p. 59)

Both Edward Said's chapter "States" (p. 523) and Ta-Nehisi Coates's "Between the World and Me" (p. 242) examine questions of identity. Choose one of these two selections, and then choose one section of that excerpt—a section that speaks to you, that seems particularly compelling for how it represents identity as both a problem and a possibility—and use it as an example to test and question Appiah's argument. Where and how might Said or Coates use a term like *imperialism*? Appiah celebrates *fractured identities*, *identity play*, *contingency*, and *irony*. How might you understand Said's or Coates's argument in relation to these terms?

Write an essay that considers two of these writers and their arguments concerning identity.



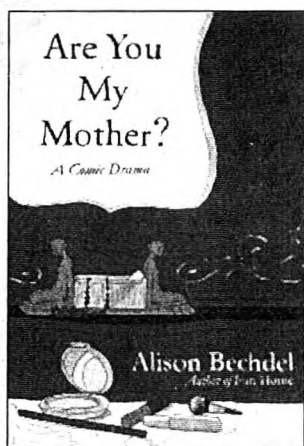
ALISON Bechdel

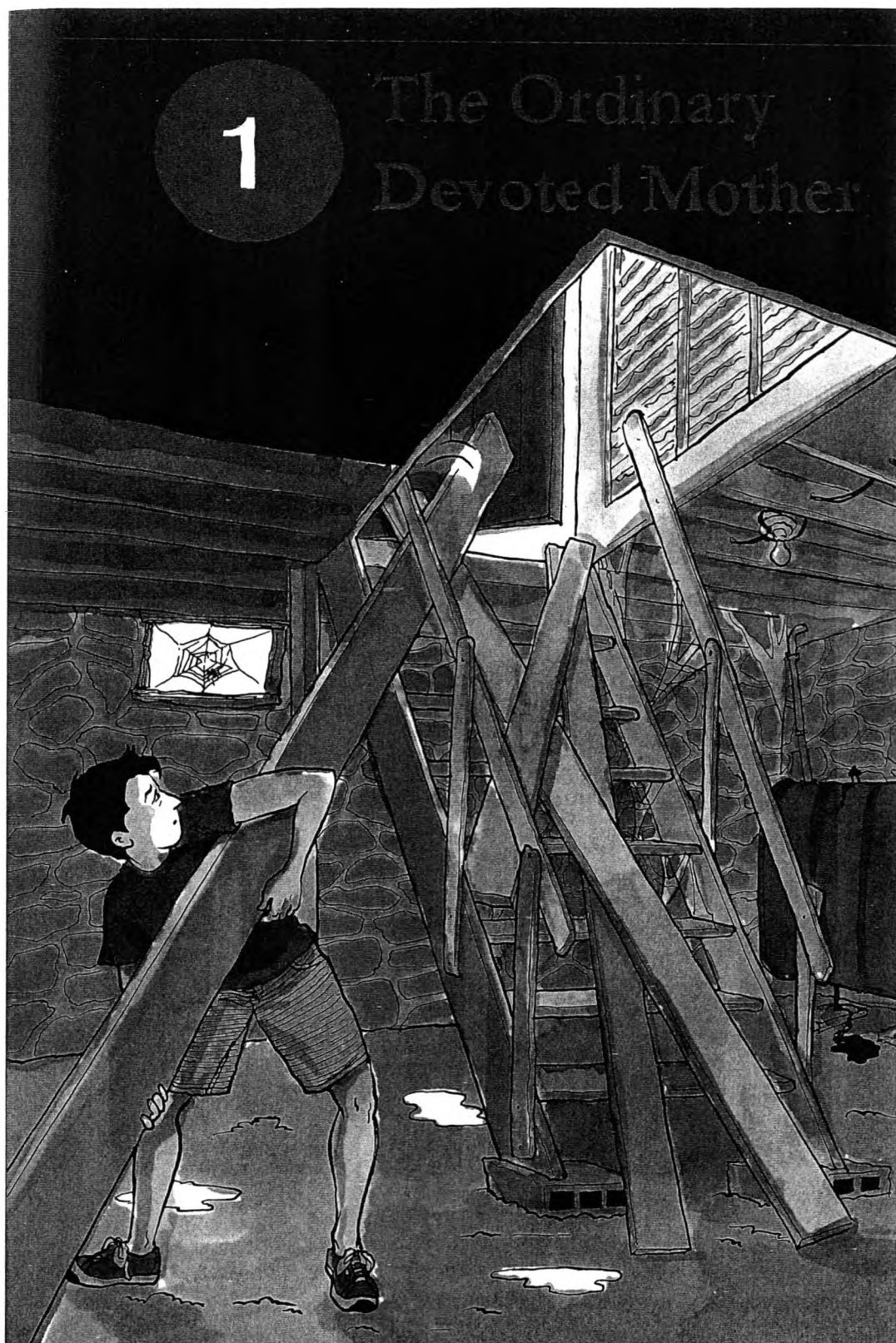
Acclaimed writer and cartoonist Alison Bechdel was born in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, in 1960. Bechdel rose to fame as the creator of the long-running comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*. The strip, which ran for twenty-five years, gained so much recognition that it was translated into five languages and appeared in over fifty publications around the world. In 2006, Bechdel published her first book, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. The book became an award-winning bestseller, a rare accomplishment for a book best described as a graphic memoir. Bechdel's work is both intimately biographical and intensely political. Through her cartoons, she takes on some complicated and contested subjects, including family, sexuality, gender, and the difficult terrain of writing autobiographically in the first place. Bechdel's cartoons have appeared in numerous national venues — among them, *Slate*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *McSweeney's*, and the *New York Times Book Review*. She also guest edited the 2011 edition of the annual *Best American Comics* anthology. In 2014, she was awarded a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, and in 2015, an adaptation of *Fun Home* won the Tony award for Best Musical.

The selection included here is from Alison Bechdel's most recent book, *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama* (2012). Named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and listed among *Time's* ten best nonfiction books of the year, *Are You My Mother?* explores Bechdel's complex relationship with her mother. The book also raises some deeply layered questions about why and how we become the individual selves we

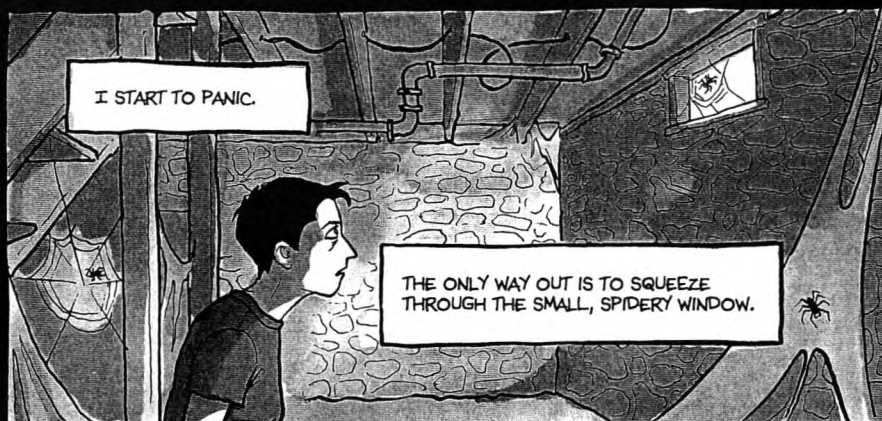
become. Ultimately, much of Bechdel's work is a chronicle of self and selves as she tries to capture, in her drawings, the rich possibility of each moment she offers her readers.

The book's title is taken from P. D. Eastman's popular children's book of the same name. In an interview with poet Sophie Mayer, Bechdel said, "Most people don't delve. Maybe because they're embarrassed. But it's what I want to talk about. I realized that my primary goal in life is to change." Bechdel is interested in psychoanalysis, in the composing process, and in the trajectory of one life as it intersects with others. "The Ordinary Devoted Mother," presented on the following pages, is the first chapter of *Are You My Mother?* The book opens with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf that reads: "For nothing was simply one thing."





Alison Bechdel, "The Ordinary Devoted Mother" from *Are You My Mother? A Comic Drama* by Alison Bechdel. Copyright © 2012 by Alison Bechdel. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.



I WALK ALONG THE BROOK, LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO CROSS.



THE STEPPING STONES
ARE UNDERWATER.

THE POOL IS DEEP AND MURKY.
IT'S WARM OUT. I'M NOT WEARING
ANYTHING I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT
GETTING WET.



I HAVE SOME CONCERN
ABOUT THE DIRTY WATER...



..BUT THIS ONLY SLIGHTLY DIMINISHES
A SUBLINE FEELING OF SURRENDER.



THIS STORY BEGINS WHEN I BEGAN TO TELL
ANOTHER STORY.



I HAD THE DREAM ABOUT THE BROOK RIGHT
BEFORE I TOLD MY MOTHER I WAS WRITING
A MEMOIR ABOUT MY FATHER.



THE EMOTION OF THE DREAM STUCK WITH ME FOR DAYS. I HAD GOTTEN MYSELF OUT OF A DEAD PLACE AND PLUNGED WITH BLIND TRUST INTO A VITAL, SENSUOUS ONE.



I FELT KIND OF LIKE I DID TWENTY YEARS EARLIER, WHEN I WAS PREPARING TO TELL HER I WAS A LESBIAN.



WHY AM I
TELLING HER
AT ALL?

AND KIND OF LIKE I DID FIVE YEARS BEFORE THAT, WHEN I WAS WORKING UP THE COURAGE TO TELL HER I'D GOTTEN MY FIRST PERIOD. THAT HAD TAKEN ME SIX MONTHS.



OKAY, SO SHE MIGHT
FREAK OUT AT FIRST,
BUT THEN SHE'LL
SAY, "WHY?"

THIS STORY---A MEMOIR ABOUT MY MOTHER---COULD BEGIN WITH EITHER OF THOSE SCENES.

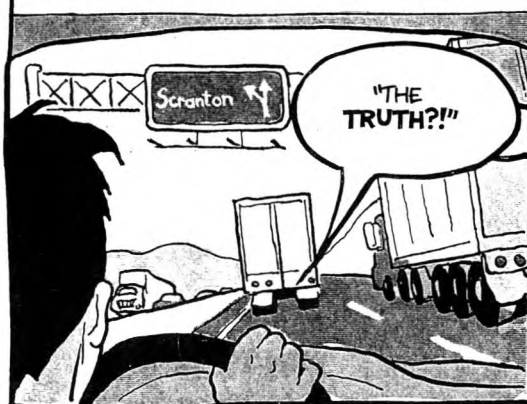


UHH...IT'S
JUST SOMETHING
I NEED TO DO.

... AND
SHE'LL SAY,
"WHY?"

I WANT TO GIVE
HIM A PROPER FUNERAL.
I WANT TO TELL
THE TRUTH.

BUT AS I CONSIDER MOVING THE BEGINNING FURTHER BACK IN TIME, BEFORE THE COMING OUT, BEFORE THE FIRST PERIOD...



"THE
TRUTH?!"

...I SEE THAT PERHAPS THE REAL PROBLEM WITH THIS MEMOIR ABOUT MY MOTHER IS THAT IT HAS NO BEGINNING.



YEAH. HIS
BISEXUALITY, THE
SUICIDE. YOU DON'T
MIND, DO YOU?

SORT OF LIKE HOW I'D UNDERSTOOD HUMAN REPRODUCTION AS A CHILD. I WAS AN EGG INSIDE MY MOTHER WHEN SHE WAS STILL AN EGG INSIDE HER MOTHER, AND SO FORTH AND SO ON.

A DIZZYING, INFINITE REGRESS.

I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU BUT I HAVE TO DO THIS.

ROAD WORK

THERE'S A CERTAIN RELIEF IN KNOWING THAT I AM A TERMINUS.

EVEN IF I'D EVER HAD THE SLIGHTEST URGE TO REPRODUCE, IT'S TOO LATE NOW. I'M RUNNING OUT OF EGGS.

MY CLOCKWORKLIKE MENSTRUAL CYCLE SKIPPED ITS FIRST BEAT THE VERY WEEK, IN MY FORTY-FIFTH YEAR, THAT I SAT DOWN TO BEGIN WRITING ABOUT MY MOTHER.

NO SHOULDER

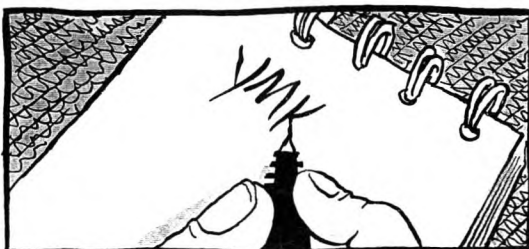
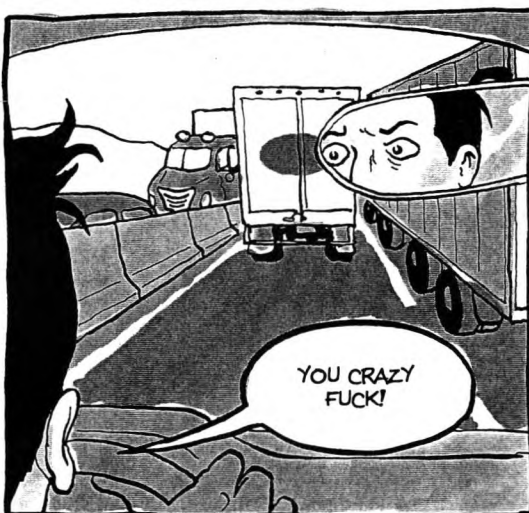
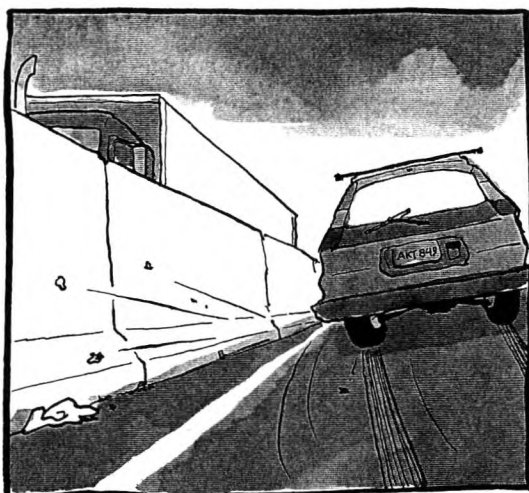
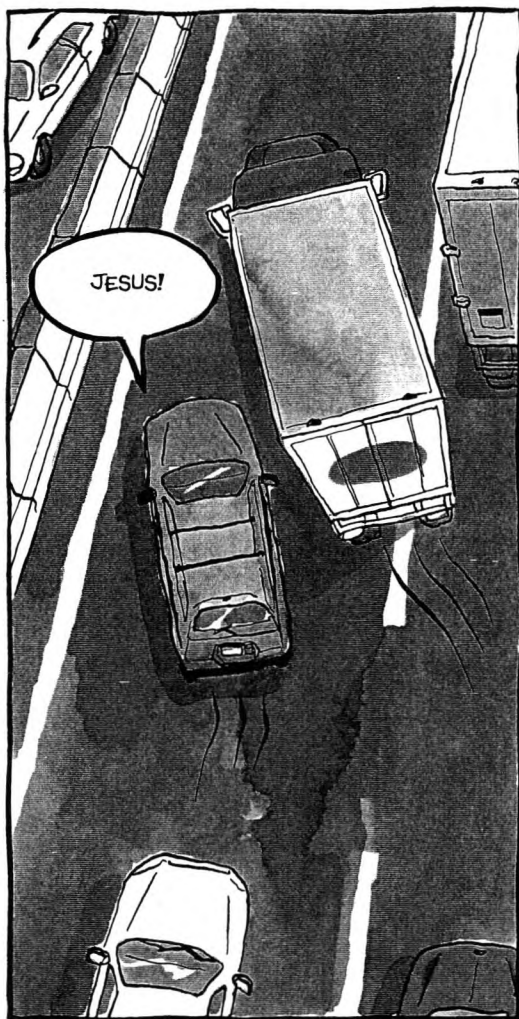
I HOPE THAT IN TIME YOU'LL COME TO UNDERSTAND...

OF COURSE, THE POINT AT WHICH I BEGAN TO WRITE THE STORY IS NOT THE SAME AS THE POINT AT WHICH THE STORY BEGINS.

OH, THAT'S GOOD. SANCTIMONIOUS AND PATRONIZING.

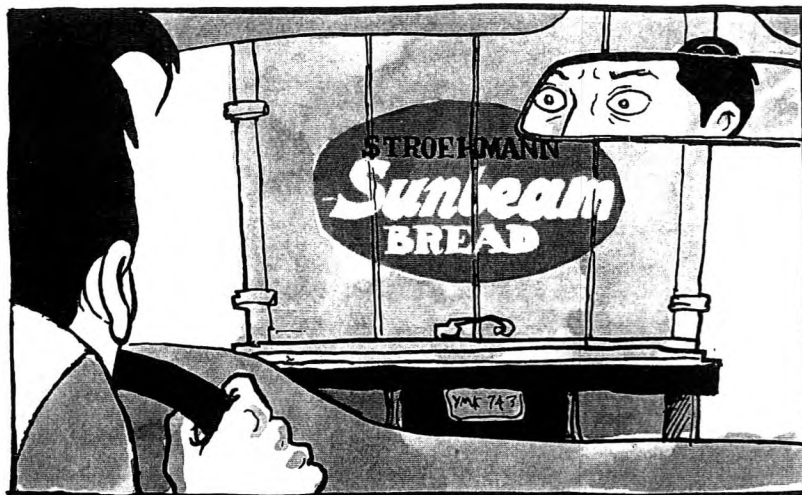
YOU CAN'T LIVE AND WRITE AT THE SAME TIME.

?



IT HAD
BEEN A
STROEHMANN
SUNBEAM BREAD
TRUCK THAT
KILLED MY
FATHER...

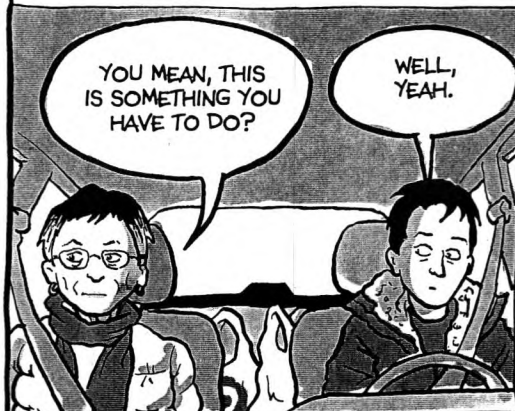
...THAT MY
FATHER LIKELY
JUMPED IN
FRONT OF.



AFTER SUCH A CURIOUSLY LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE BRUSH WITH DEATH, TELLING MY MOTHER ABOUT THE BOOK LOOMED RATHER SMALLER.



AND A FEW DAYS LATER, RETURNING WITH HER FROM A STRING OF ERRANDS, I DID IT.



YOU MEAN, THIS
IS SOMETHING YOU
HAVE TO DO?

WELL,
YEAH.



I CAN'T HELP YOU.
YOU'RE ON YOUR
OWN.

ON THE WHOLE, IT WENT AS WELL AS I COULD HAVE HOPED. MOM'S BOYFRIEND, BOB, CAME OVER FOR DINNER THAT NIGHT.

SHE SAYS IT'S SOMETHING SHE HAS TO DO.

AND YOU'RE OKAY WITH IT?



I FEEL RECKLESS. TELL EVERYONE.

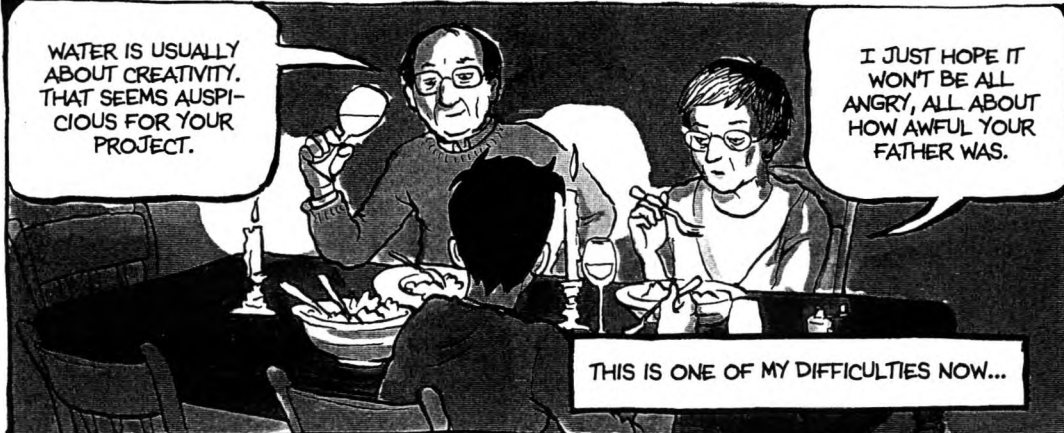
I'M GONNA GO DO MY PUZZLE.



BOB IS A RETIRED PSYCHIATRIST. HE HAD SOME INSIGHT INTO MY BROOK DREAM.

WATER IS USUALLY ABOUT CREATIVITY. THAT SEEMS AUSPICIOUS FOR YOUR PROJECT.

I JUST HOPE IT WON'T BE ALL ANGRY, ALL ABOUT HOW AWFUL YOUR FATHER WAS.



THIS IS ONE OF MY DIFFICULTIES NOW...

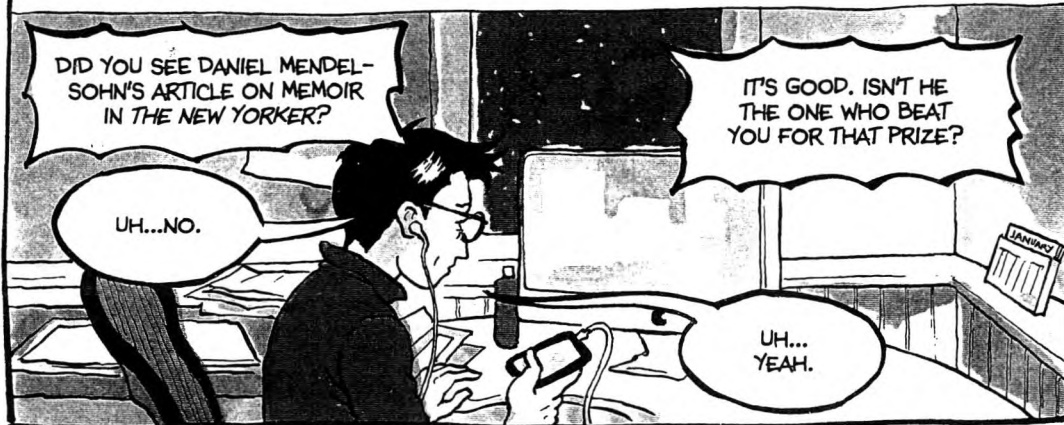
...MY FEAR THAT MOM WILL FIND THIS MEMOIR ABOUT HER "ANGRY." ANOTHER DIFFICULTY IS THE FACT THAT THE STORY OF MY MOTHER AND ME IS UNFOLDING EVEN AS I WRITE IT.

DID YOU SEE DANIEL MENDEL-SOHN'S ARTICLE ON MEMOIR IN THE NEW YORKER?

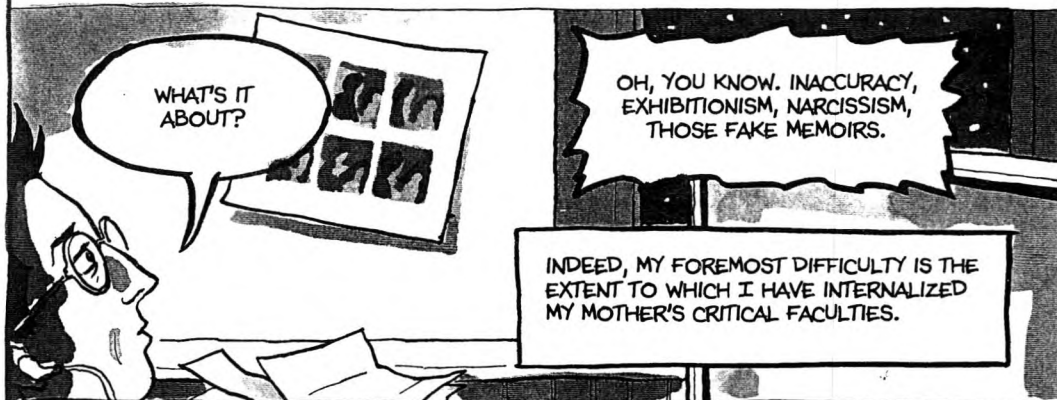
IT'S GOOD. ISN'T HE THE ONE WHO BEAT YOU FOR THAT PRIZE?

UH...NO.

UH...YEAH.



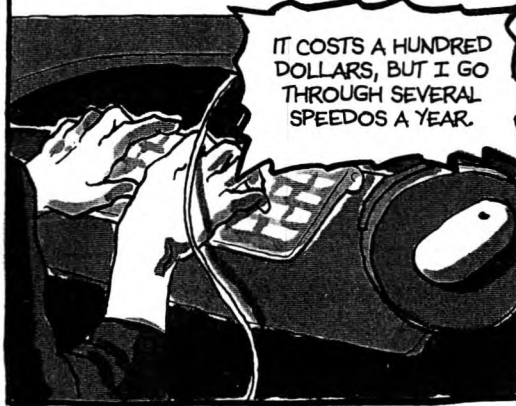
YET ANOTHER DIFFICULTY IS THE FACT THAT MY MOTHER CONSIDERS MEMOIR A SUSPECT GENRE. THIS ADDS A CONFUSING OBSERVER EFFECT TO THE WHOLE PROCESS.



AS OF THIS MOMENT, I'VE BEEN STRUGGLING FOR FOUR YEARS WITH THE WRITING OF THIS BOOK, THIS MEMOIR ABOUT MY MOTHER.



I TALK TO MY MOTHER ALMOST EVERY DAY. THAT IS, I CALL, SHE TALKS, I LISTEN. THAT'S OUR PATTERN.



I MUST CONFESS THAT I HAVE TAKEN TO TRANSCRIBING WHAT SHE SAYS. I DON'T THINK SHE KNOWS I'M DOING IT, WHICH MAKES IT A BIT UNETHICAL.

1/29/2010, 4:15 pm

article in New Yorker on memoir

Isn't daniel mendelsohn the one who be

A new chlorine-resistant swimsuit, for \$1
Maybe I'll decide to spring for it. I go the
not sure about size. Sizes don't mean anything any more?

THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD
SAID SHE COULDN'T PUT UP VINYL SID-
ING, BUT THE TOWN OVERRULED THEM
BECAUSE SHE'S A POOR WIDOW.

somebody bought that house down the street when it was up for auction, and then
flipped it. They covered up the original painted brick and slapped on vinyl siding.
They ruined it. You know how it was when I moved up here. A woman wanted to
up vinyl siding and the arch. review board said no, but the town overruled them.

BUT I WANT TO CAPTURE HER VOICE, HER PRECISE WORDING, HER DEADPAN HUMOR. I DON'T THINK I COULD POSSIBLY RE-CREATE IT ON MY OWN.



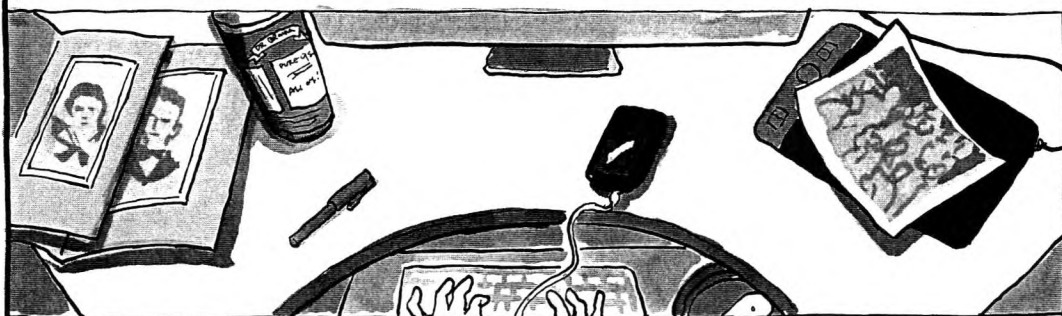
WELL, I'M A POOR WIDOW, TOO, AND I DON'T WANT TO LOOK AT VINYL SIDING!

I'M TRYING SO HARD TO GET DOWN WHAT SHE'S SAYING THAT I'M NOT REALLY LISTENING PROPERLY.



UH HUH...

I WOULD HAVE MORE SCRUPLES ABOUT THIS, I LIKE TO THINK, IF I DIDN'T SUSPECT THAT SHE WAS NOT SO MUCH TALKING TO ME AS DRAFTING HER OWN DAILY JOURNAL ENTRY OUT LOUD.

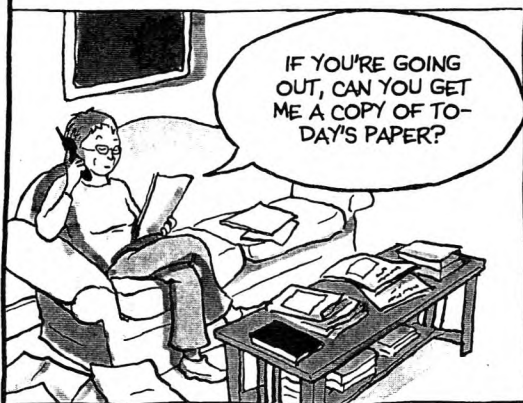


MY MOTHER HAS ALWAYS KEPT A JOURNAL. SHE INSISTS THIS IS JUST A RECORD OF THINGS SHE'S DONE. OF EXTERNAL, AS OPPOSED TO INTERNAL, EXPERIENCE.

I SHARE THIS COMPULSION FOR KEEPING TRACK OF LIFE.

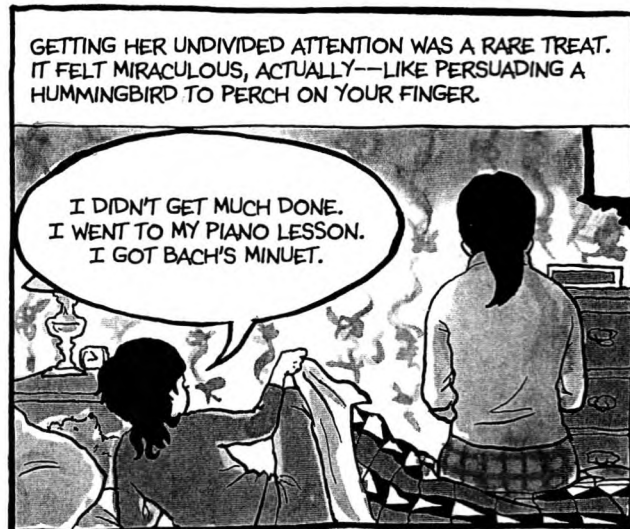


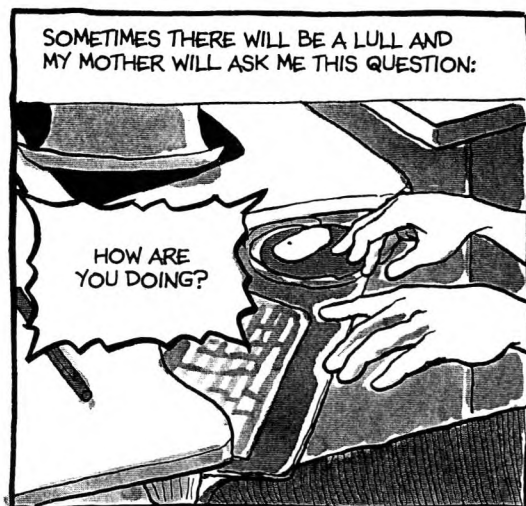
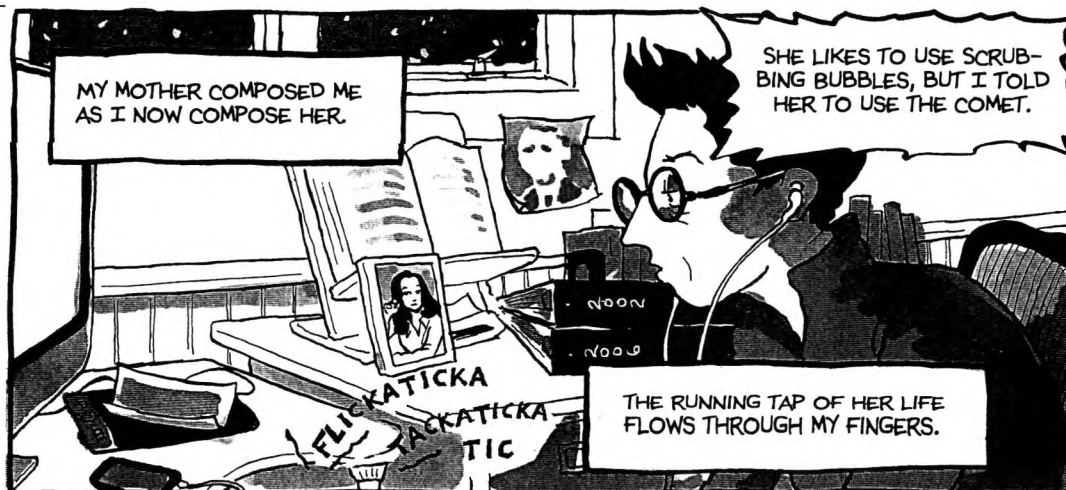
MY MOTHER LOGS HER DAILY ACTIVITIES IN HER JOURNAL. AND EVERY DAY SHE READS ANOTHER JOURNAL--THE NEW YORK TIMES.





I OFTEN THINK OF THIS PASSAGE FROM VIRGINIA WOOLF'S DIARY: "WHAT A DISGRACEFUL LAPSE! NOTHING ADDED TO MY DISQUISITION, & LIFE ALLOWED TO WASTE LIKE A TAP LEFT RUNNING. ELEVEN DAYS UNRECORDED."





MY CONSIDERABLE VERBAL APTITUDE OFTEN FAILS ME COMPLETELY WHEN I'M TALKING TO MY MOTHER.

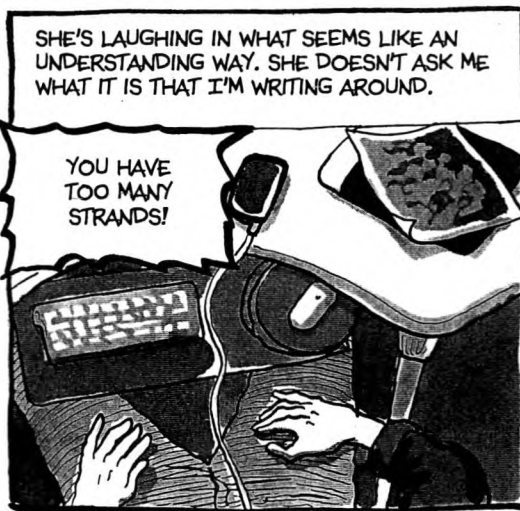
When she cleans the bathroom to use the comet.

She asks how I'm doing.

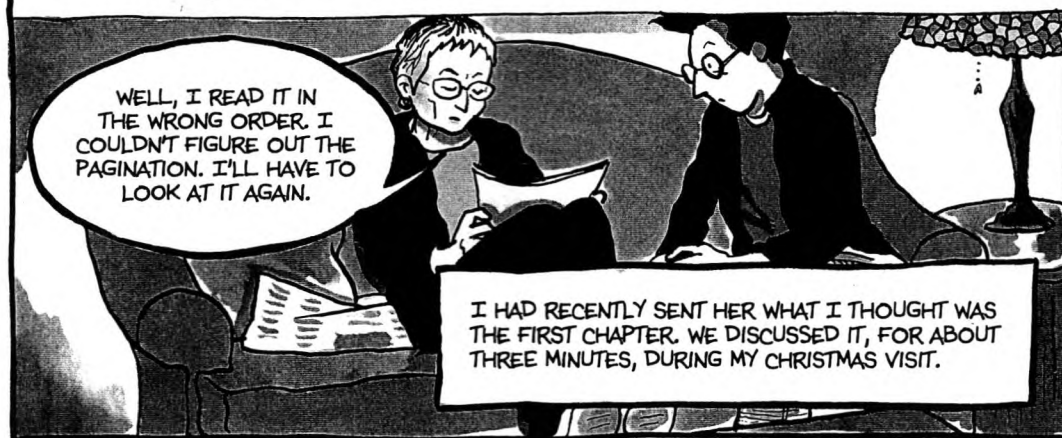
THROUGHOUT MY TWENTIES AND THIRTIES, SHE NEVER ASKED ME ABOUT MY LIFE.



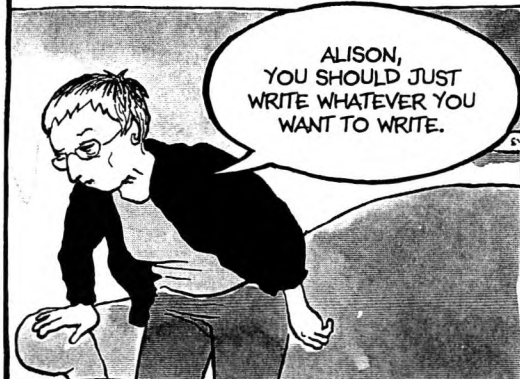
BUT I KNOW I CAN'T BLAME HER FOR DOMINATING OUR CONVERSATIONS IF I REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE. SO SOMETIMES, LIKE TODAY, I DIVULGE SOMETHING.



SHE KNOWS THIS BOOK IS ABOUT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH HER, AND SHE SEEMS TO FEEL ABOUT IT ROUGHLY THE WAY SHE FELT ABOUT THE BOOK ON MY FATHER--RESIGNED.



THE CHAPTER HAD BEEN A TURGID ABSTRACTION ABOUT THE SELF AND DESIRE THAT BARELY MENTIONED MY MOTHER.



HER TONE WAS WEARY BUT NOT UNKIND. SHE SEEMED TO BE SAYING, "WRITE ABOUT ME IF YOU MUST, BUT DON'T ASK ME TO APPROVE IT."



TWO NIGHTS AFTER RECEIVING THIS MIXED BLESSING, I HAD AN ECHO OF THE BROOK DREAM I'D HAD TEN YEARS EARLIER. I WAS SOMEWHAT BETTER EQUIPPED THIS TIME.



THE ONLY WAY OUT WAS TO DIVE INTO THE WATER AND SWIM UNDERNEATH THE ROCK LEDGE. IF I DID THIS, I'D COME UP ON THE OTHER SIDE, UNDER THE OPEN SKY.

I KNEW I COULD MAKE IT, BUT AT THE SAME TIME I WAS TERRIFIED OF GETTING STUCK DOWN THERE. I STALLED, FUSSING WITH MY MASK TO GET A GOOD SEAL.



FINALLY, I HAD DETERMINED TO JUMP...

...WHEN I WOKE UP.



I TOOK THIS DREAM, LIKE THE EARLIER ONE, AS A GOOD SIGN, AN INDICATION THAT I WAS GETTING SOMEWHERE WITH MY WRITING.

BUT WITHIN A FEW DAYS, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT "GETTING SOMEWHERE" MEANT STARTING OVER. THIS FELT ODDLY ENCOURAGING.



LIKE MY MOTHER, I KEEP A LOG OF THE EVENTS OF DAILY, EXTERNAL LIFE. BUT UNLIKE HER, I ALSO RECORD A GREAT DEAL OF INFORMATION ABOUT MY INTERNAL LIFE.

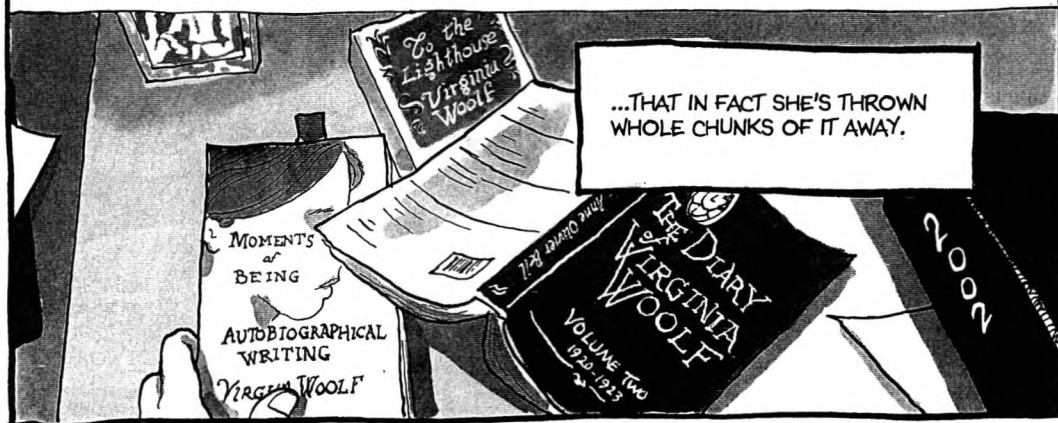
ALTHOUGH I'M OFTEN CONFUSED ABOUT PRECISELY WHERE THE DEMARCATION LIES.

VIRGINIA WOOLF SEEMS TO HAVE CONSIDERED HER OWN DIARY TO BE MORE OF AN EXTERNAL RECORD, AN ACCOUNT OF "LIFE" RATHER THAN "THE SOUL."

Monday 19 February

How it would interest me if this diary were ever to become a real diary: something in which I could see changes, trace moods developing; but then I should have to speak of the soul, & did I not banish the soul when I began? What happens is, as usual, that I'm going to write about the soul, & life breaks in. Talking of diaries sets me thinking of old Kate, in the dining room at 4 Rosary Gardens; & how she opened the cabinet (wh. I remember) & there in a row on a shelf were her diaries from Jan 1 1877.¹³ Some were brown; others red; all the same to a t. And I made her read an entry; one of many thousand days, like pebbles

WOOLF'S DISMISSAL OF "THE SOUL" REMINDS ME A BIT OF MY MOTHER'S INSISTENCE THAT HER OWN JOURNAL IS LITTLE MORE THAN A COMPLETED TO-DO LIST, THAT SHE NEVER RE-READS IT...



I'M SURE THESE THINGS ARE TRUE.

BUT THE WAY SHE SAYS THEM FEELS LIKE AN IMPLIED CRITICISM. AS IF SHE'S COMPARING HER OWN SELFLESSNESS TO MY SELF-ABSORPTION.

BUT OF COURSE THAT'S JUST EVIDENCE OF MY SELF-ABSORPTION. MY MOTHER IS PROBABLY NOT THINKING ANYTHING LIKE THIS.



IN FACT, MY DESIRE TO THINK THAT SHE'S THINKING OF ME AT ALL IS A BIT PATHETIC.

SHE LOOMS MUCH LARGER IN MY PSYCHE THAN I LOOM IN HERS. WOOLF SAYS THAT HER OWN MOTHER, WHO DIED WHEN VIRGINIA WAS THIRTEEN, OBSESSED HER UNTIL SHE WAS FORTY-FOUR.

when I was thirteen, until I was forty-four. Then one day walking round Tavistock Square I made up, as I sometimes make up my books, *To the Lighthouse*; in a great, apparently involuntary, rush. One thing burst into another. Blowing bubbles out of a pipe.

LET'S LEAVE ASIDE THE ANNOYING RAPIDITY WITH WHICH SHE DISPATCHED THIS MASTERPIECE. THE POINT IS, WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD.

when it was written, I ceased to be obsessed by my mother. I no longer hear her voice; I do not see her. I suppose that I did for myself what psychoanalysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest. But what is

I'VE BEEN IN THERAPY FOR NEARLY MY ENTIRE ADULT LIFE AND HAVE NOT LAID MY DEEPLY FELT EMOTIONS ABOUT MY MOTHER TO REST.



MY LIFE IS A MESS. I'VE BEEN IN A REALLY SOLID RELATIONSHIP FOR EIGHT YEARS...

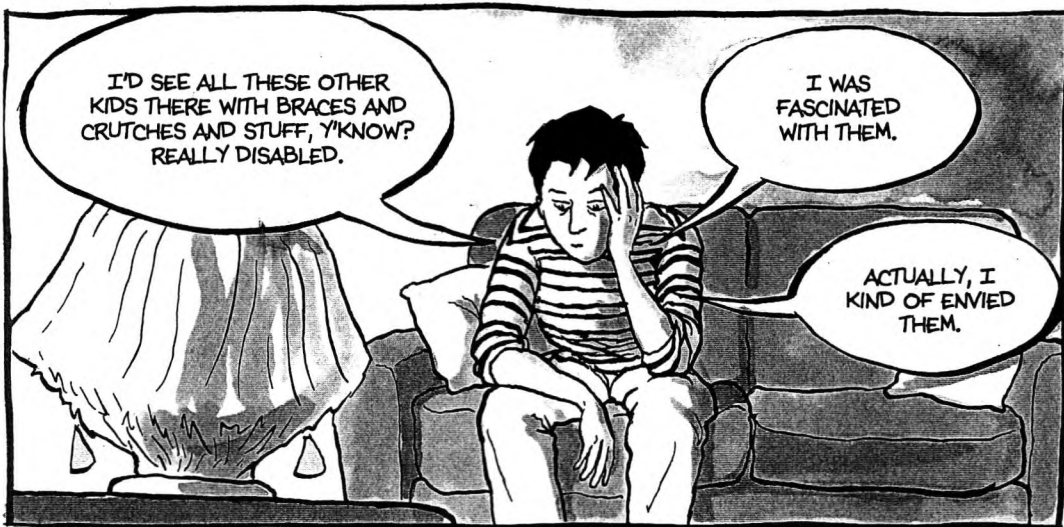
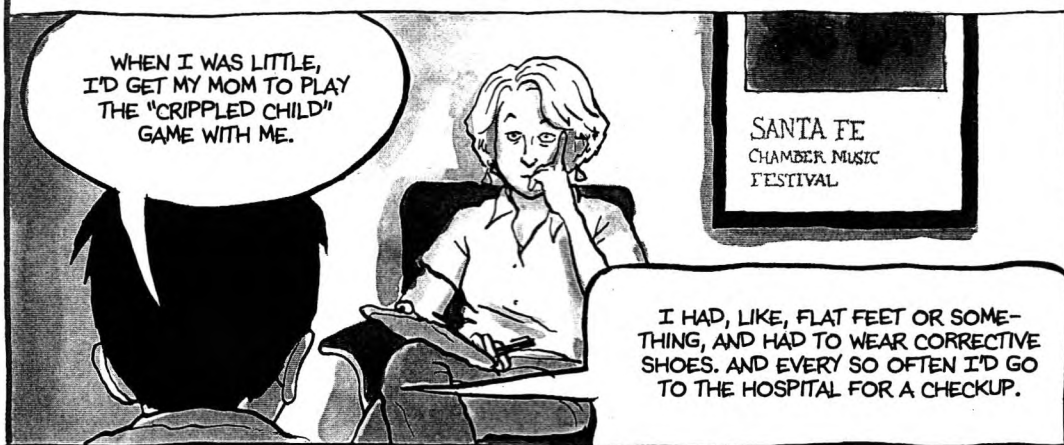
I STARTED SEEING MY CURRENT THERAPIST, CAROL, TEN YEARS AGO.

BUT I KEEP GETTING ATTRACTED TO OTHER PEOPLE.

I'M WRITING THIS MEMOIR ABOUT MY DAD'S SUICIDE AND FOR EVERY SENTENCE I PUT DOWN, I DELETE TWO.



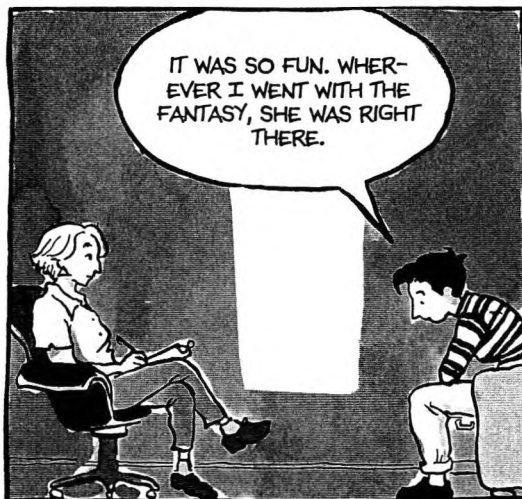
BUT LONG BEFORE CAROL, THERE WAS JOCELYN. I STARTED SEEING HER WHEN I WAS TWENTY-SIX.



I'D PRETEND I WAS A "CRIPPLED" CHILD, AND MOM WOULD PLAY ALONG WITH IT.



IT WAS SO FUN. WHEREVER I WENT WITH THE FANTASY, SHE WAS RIGHT THERE.



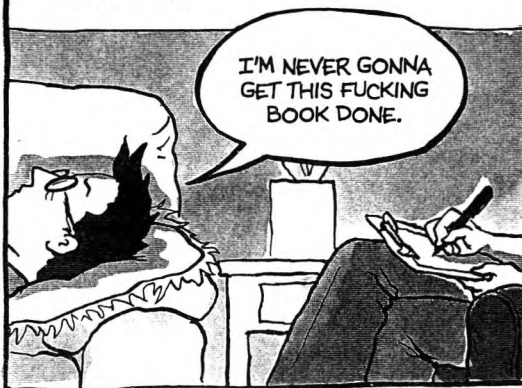
FOR MY FIRST TWO YEARS WITH CAROL, I JUST SAT ON THE COUCH. BUT THEN I BEGAN LYING DOWN ON IT. IN THE TIME I'VE BEEN SEEING HER, SHE HAS BECOME A PSYCHOANALYST.



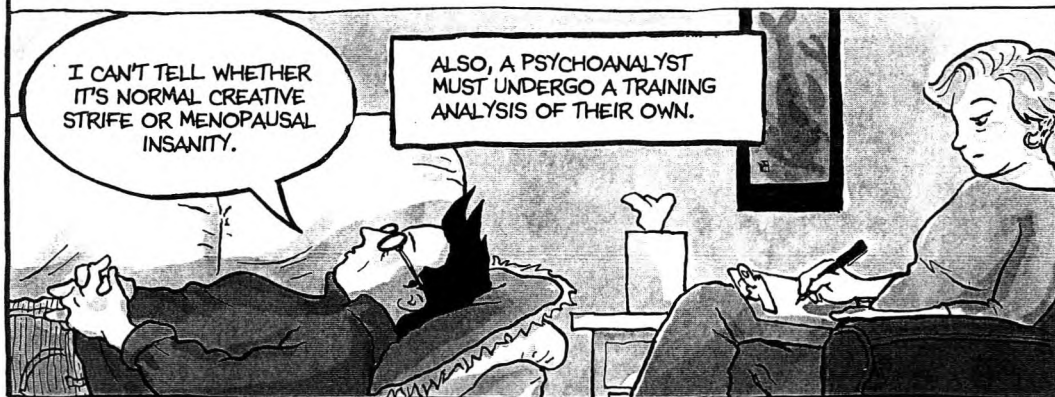
ANALYSIS AND THERAPY ARE DIFFERENT IN MANY WAYS, BUT THE SEATING ARRANGEMENT IS A BIG ONE.



IN THIS POSITION THE PATIENT CAN'T SEE THE ANALYST. AND LYING DOWN, IN THEORY, ALLOWS MORE READY ACCESS TO THE UNCONSCIOUS.

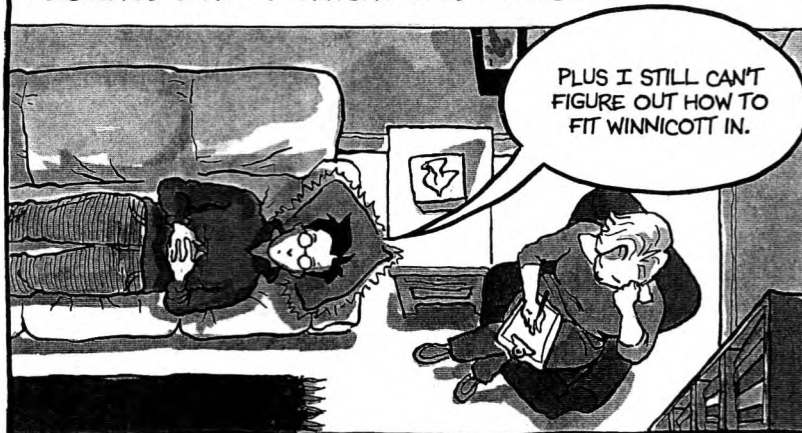


ANALYSIS IS IN NO HURRY TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THINGS. THERAPY IS USUALLY A SHORTER-TERM PROPOSITION, MORE FOCUSED ON SYMPTOM RELIEF.

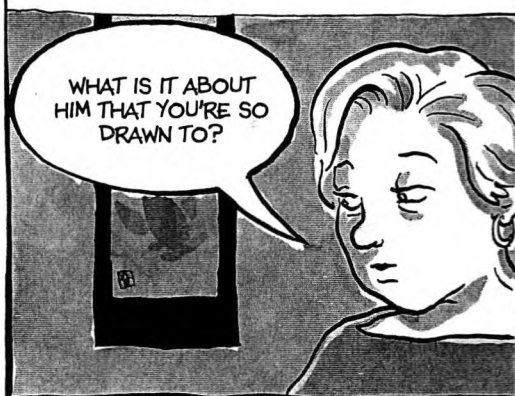


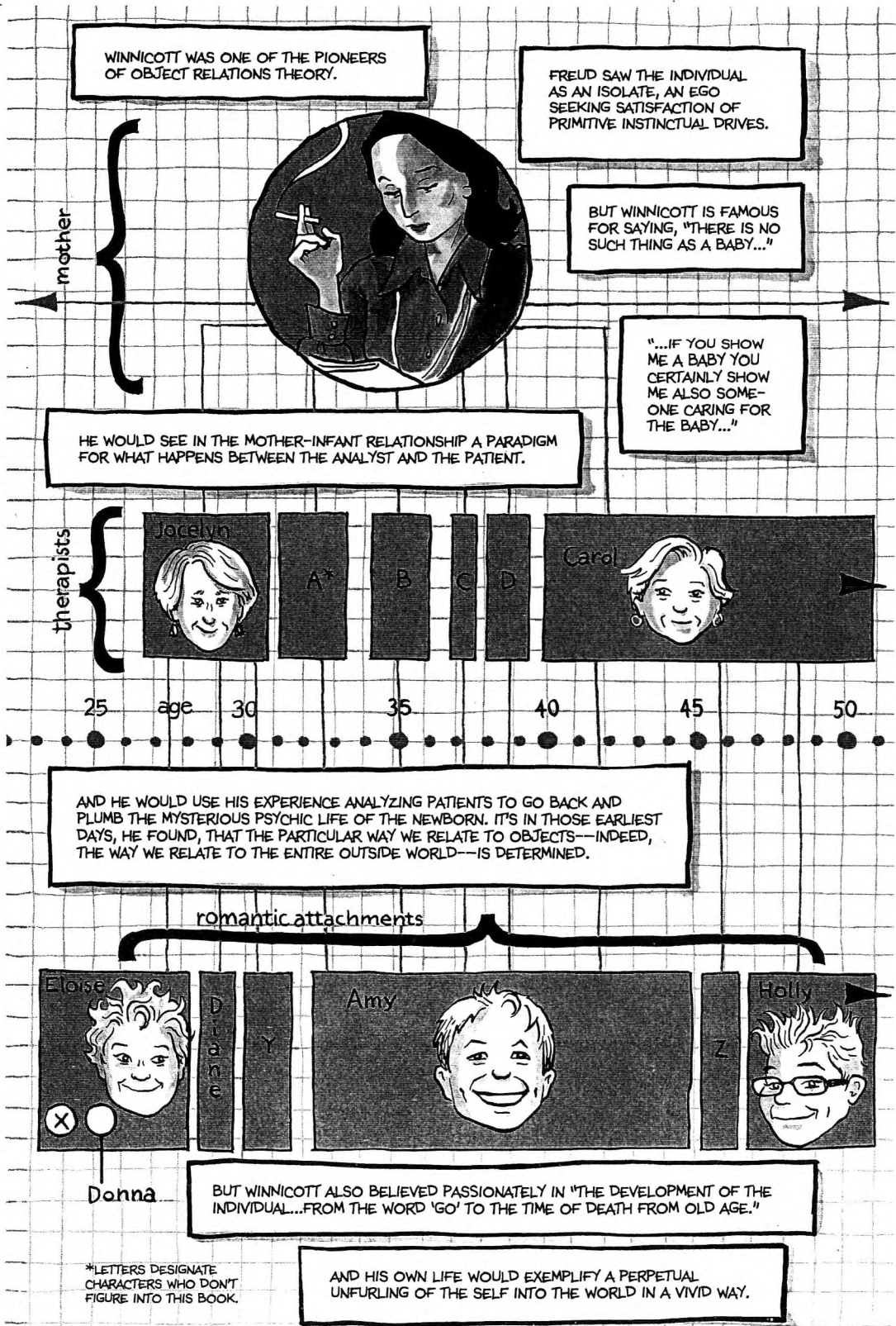
ONE REASON THIS MEMOIR IS TAKING ME SO LONG IS THAT I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT—FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE COUCH—JUST WHAT IT IS THAT PSYCHO-ANALYSTS DO FOR THEIR PATIENTS.

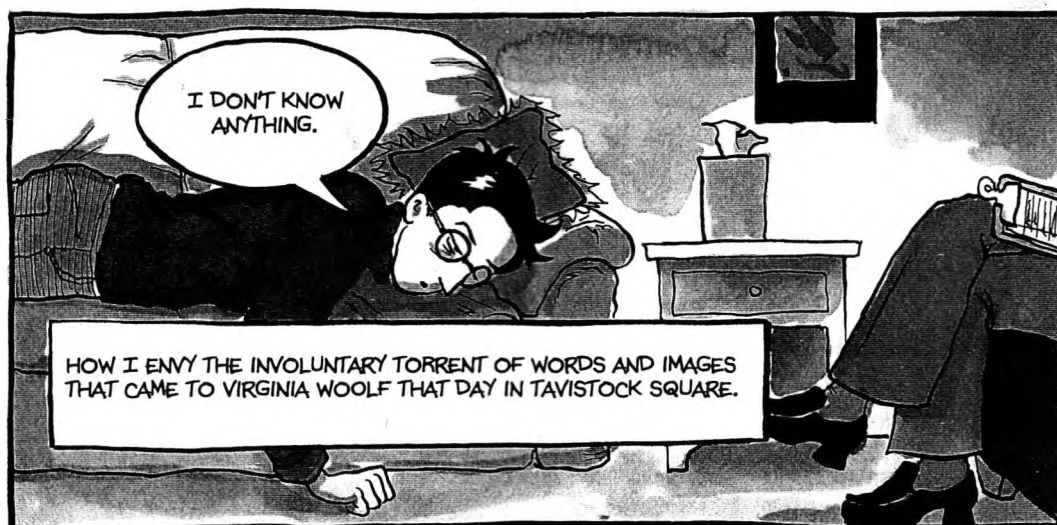
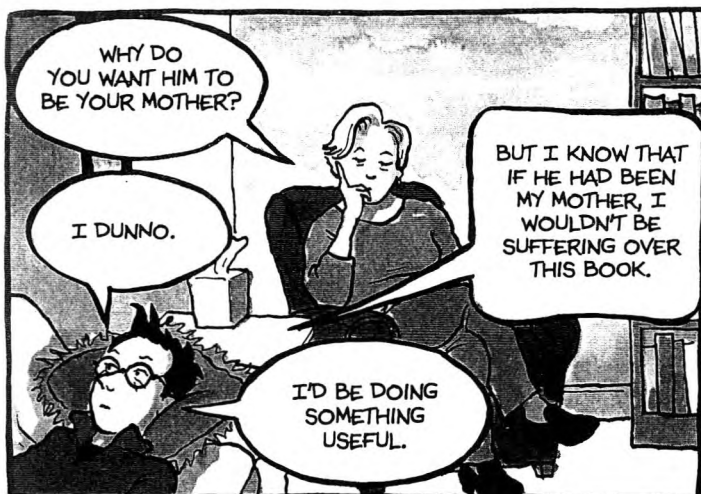
IN PARTICULAR, I HAVE BEEN STUDYING THE WORK OF THE BRITISH PSYCHOANALYST AND PEDIATRICIAN DONALD WINNICOTT.



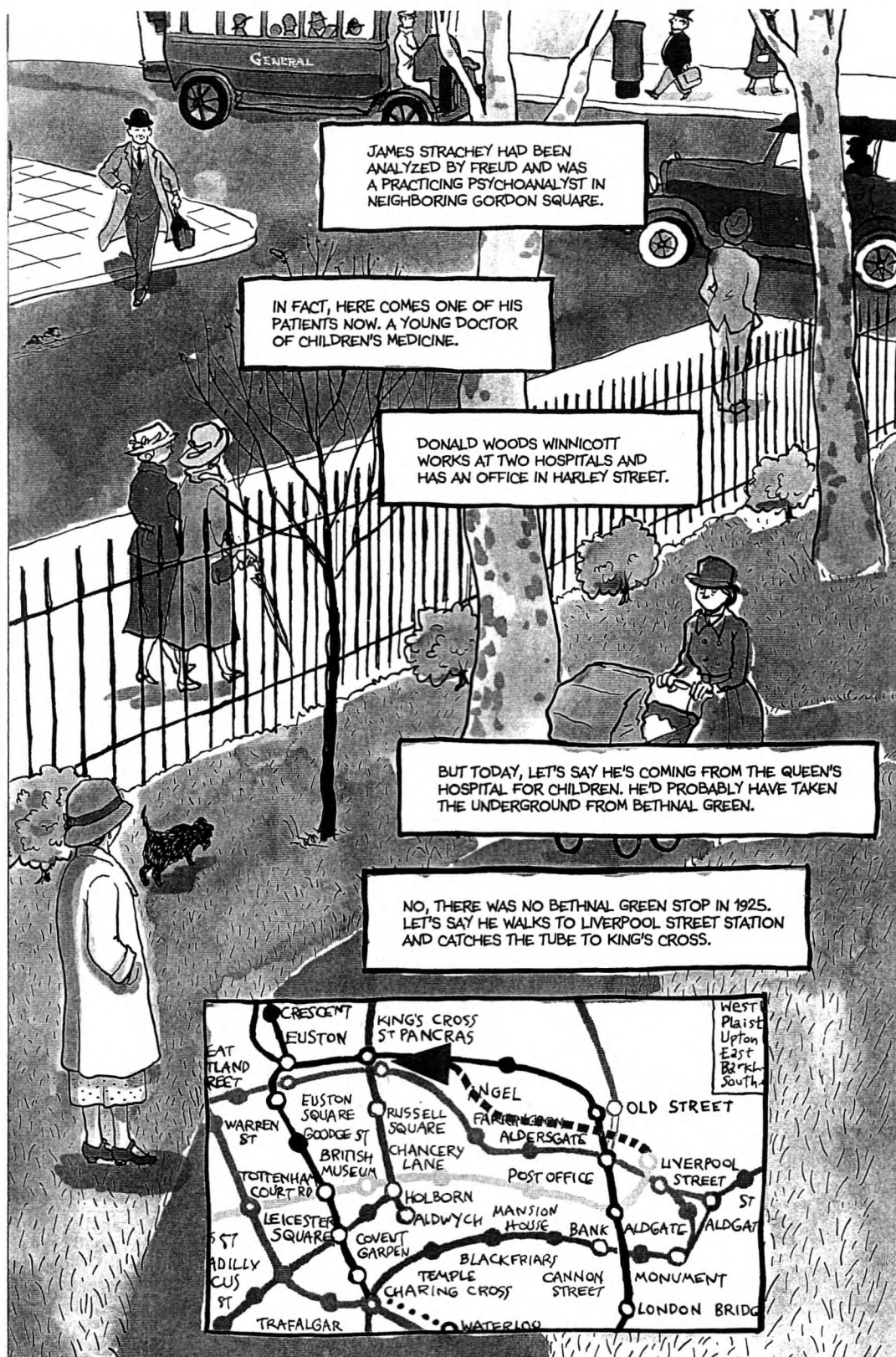
IT HAS TAKEN ME SEVERAL YEARS TO FEEL AS IF I HAVE EVEN A SLENDER GRASP OF HIS CURIOUSLY COMPELLING IDEAS.

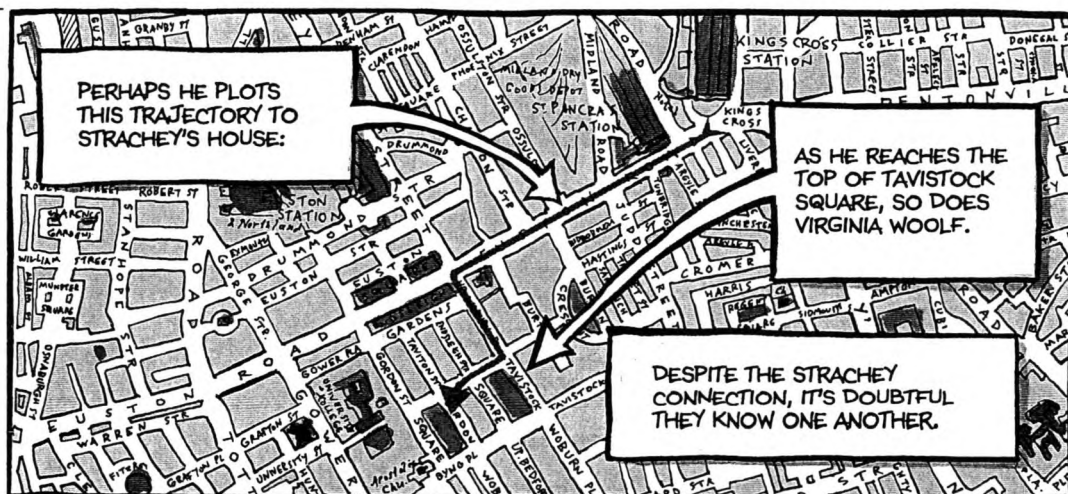


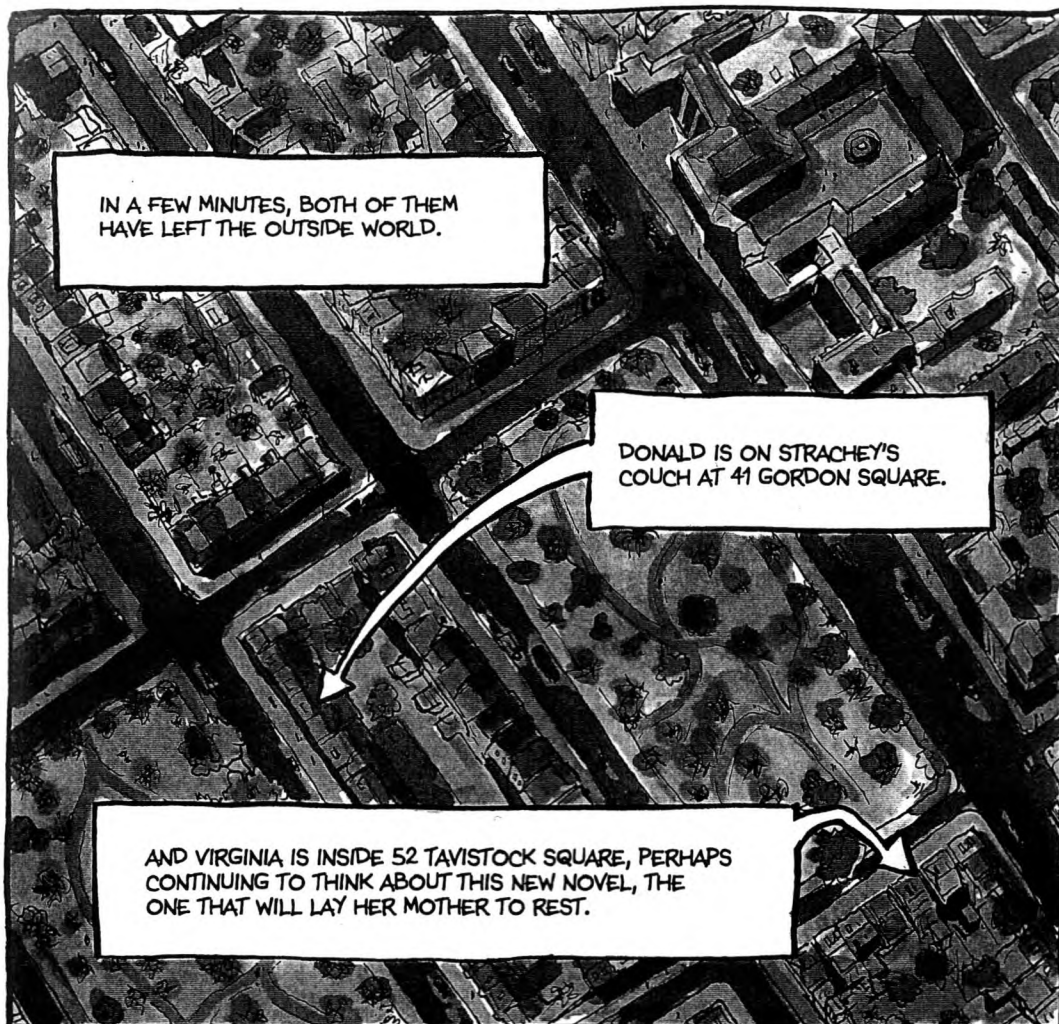












DONALD IS VERY POSSIBLY THINKING ABOUT HIS MOTHER, TOO. SHE HAS EITHER JUST DIED, OR WILL DIE BEFORE 1925 IS OUT. I CAN'T FIND THE EXACT DATE.



THIS WAS AN ACTUAL DREAM OF WINNICOTT'S. ALTHOUGH I AM ENJOYING THIS LITTLE FORAY INTO FICTION, I FEEL THE NECESSITY OF "CLINGING AS TIGHT TO FACTS AS I CAN," AS WOOLF WROTE IN HER 1923 DIARY ABOUT HER PROGRESS ON MRS. DALLOWAY.

BUT I AM NOT ULTIMATELY INTERESTED IN WRITING FICTION. I CAN'T MAKE THINGS UP. OR RATHER, I CAN ONLY MAKE THINGS UP ABOUT THINGS THAT HAVE ALREADY HAPPENED.



I HAVE TO
REWRITE MY
BOOK.

WHAT?!

I HAVE TO
START OVER.

ONCE
MY MOTHER
TOLD ME SHE
WISHED I HAD
WRITTEN THE
BOOK ABOUT
MY FATHER AS
FICTION.

ON THE
THEORY THAT
IT WOULD NOT
HAVE EXPOSED
OUR FAMILY IN
THE WAY
MEMOIR
DID.

I EXPLAINED THAT THE WHOLE POINT OF THE BOOK WAS THAT IT WAS TRUE, AND THAT EVEN IF I HAD FICTIONALIZED IT, PEOPLE WOULD ASSUME IT WAS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL.



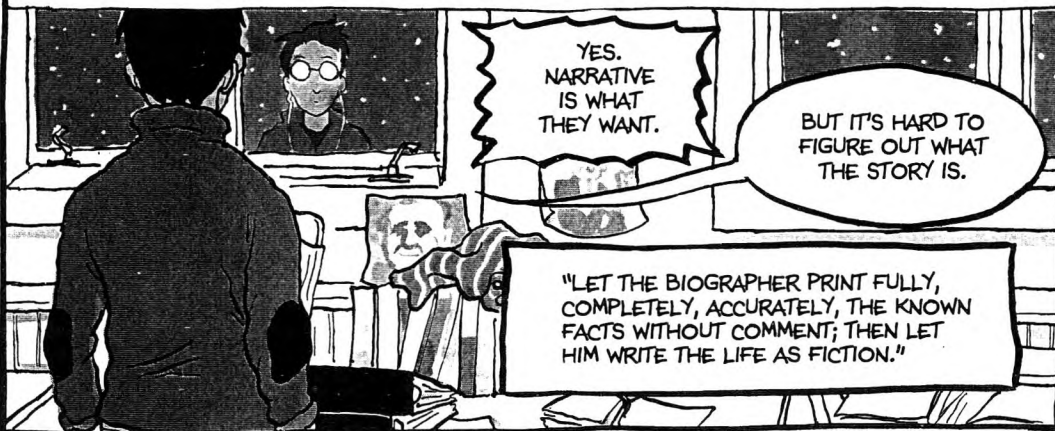
HA! YOU HAVE TOO
MANY STRANDS!

THIS HAD NOT SWAYED HER. TO THE LIGHTHOUSE IS FICTION, OF COURSE, BUT HEAVILY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL.



I DO. I JUST
NEED TO TELL
A STORY.

IN THE SAME WAY VIRGINIA WOOLF DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN "LIFE" AND "THE SOUL" IN HER DIARY, SHE DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN "TWO KINDS OF TRUTH" IN WRITING BIOGRAPHY.



YES.
NARRATIVE
IS WHAT
THEY WANT.

BUT IT'S HARD TO
FIGURE OUT WHAT
THE STORY IS.

"LET THE BIOGRAPHER PRINT FULLY,
COMPLETELY, ACCURATELY, THE KNOWN
FACTS WITHOUT COMMENT; THEN LET
HIM WRITE THE LIFE AS FICTION."

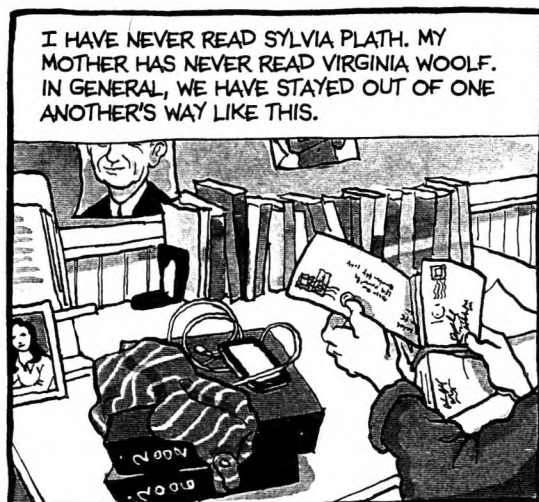
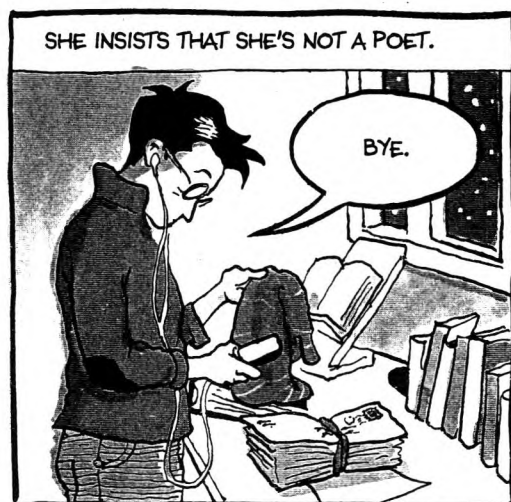
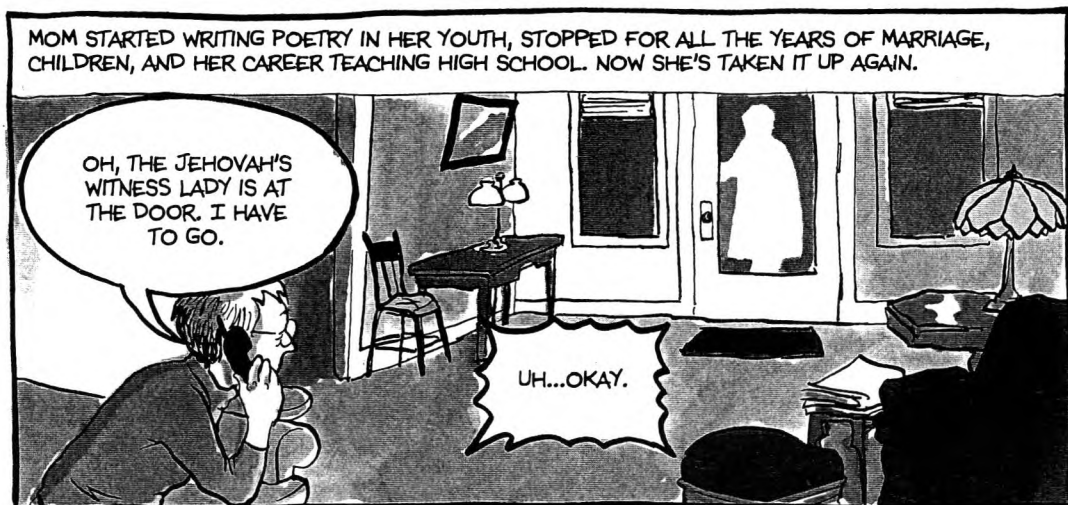
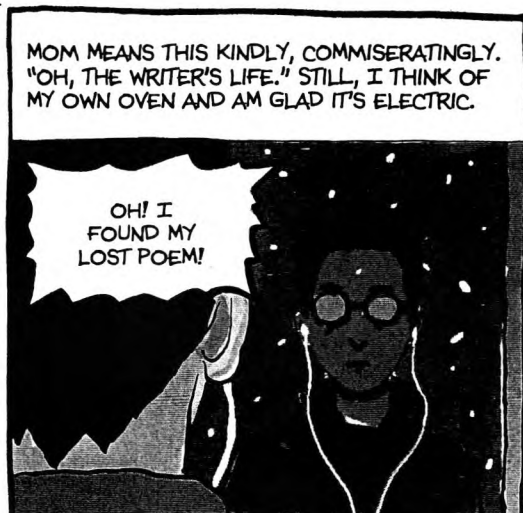
IN *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*, THE CHARACTER LILY BRISCOE HAS A BRIEF VISION AS SHE WATCHES MR. AND MRS. RAMSAY PLAYING CATCH WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

ing catches. And suddenly the meaning which, for no reason at all, as perhaps they are stepping out of the Tube or ringing a doorbell, descends on people, making them symbolical, making them representative, came upon them, and made them in the dusk standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolical outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, and they became, as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay watching the children throwing catches. But still for a mo-

THIS "SYMBOLICAL" QUALITY THAT TRANSCENDS MERE "REAL FIGURES" SEEMS TO BE WHAT FICTION ACHIEVES FOR WOOLF--A DEEPER TRUTH THAN FACTS.

PERHAPS THAT'S WHY SHE FOUND IT "DIFFICULT TO GIVE ANY CLEAR DESCRIPTION" OF HER ACTUAL, NONFICTIONAL MOTHER. SHE WAS "ASTONISHINGLY BEAUTIFUL..."





WHEN SHE WAS EXACTLY THE AGE I AM NOW, AND I WAS IN MY EARLY TWENTIES, MOM RESPONDED TO A LETTER I'D WRITTEN TO HER ABOUT A DREAM I'D HAD.

will probably hear from him since he wants to stay over with you on his way home.

I have puzzled over your dream. I don't know what it means. I dream about brain tumors and babies. I am staring out my dirty windows at the lilac buds. Now I am trying to analyze why I put those two things together. Why do you and I do that? Patterns are my existence. Everything has significance. Everything must fit. It's enough to drive you crazy.

Today I gave one class a list of words for your enemy. Sycophant, philanderer, little rash, but I didn't have time

BRAIN TUMORS AND BABIES.
DIRTY WINDOWS AND LILAC BUDS.

THIS
SEARCH FOR
MEANINGFUL
PATTERNS MAY
VERY WELL BE
CRAZY,
BUT TO BE
ENLISTED
WITH HER IN IT
THRILLS ME.
"WHY DO YOU
AND I DO
THAT?"

I AM
CARRYING ON
HER MISSION.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED BY THIS SNAPSHOT OF THE TWO OF US.



BUT I DIDN'T REALIZE UNTIL RELATIVELY
RECENTLY THAT IT WAS ONE OF A SEQUENCE.

FIVE OTHER SHOTS HAD BEEN SCATTERED
ABOUT IN DIFFERENT ALBUMS AND BOXES.



I CALLED MOM A FEW DAYS AFTER THE
HEAD-IN-THE-OVEN CONVERSATION.



HEY, MOM. JUST
CHECKING IN. WHERE
ARE YA? CALL ME.

I DON'T HAVE THE NEGATIVES, SO THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW THEIR CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER. BUT I'VE ARRANGED THEM ACCORDING TO MY OWN NARRATIVE.

MOM IS MAKING FACES AND PRESUMABLY SOUNDS AT ME. IN EACH SHOT, I REFLECT HER EXPRESSION AND THE SHAPE OF HER MOUTH WITH UNCANNY PRECISION.

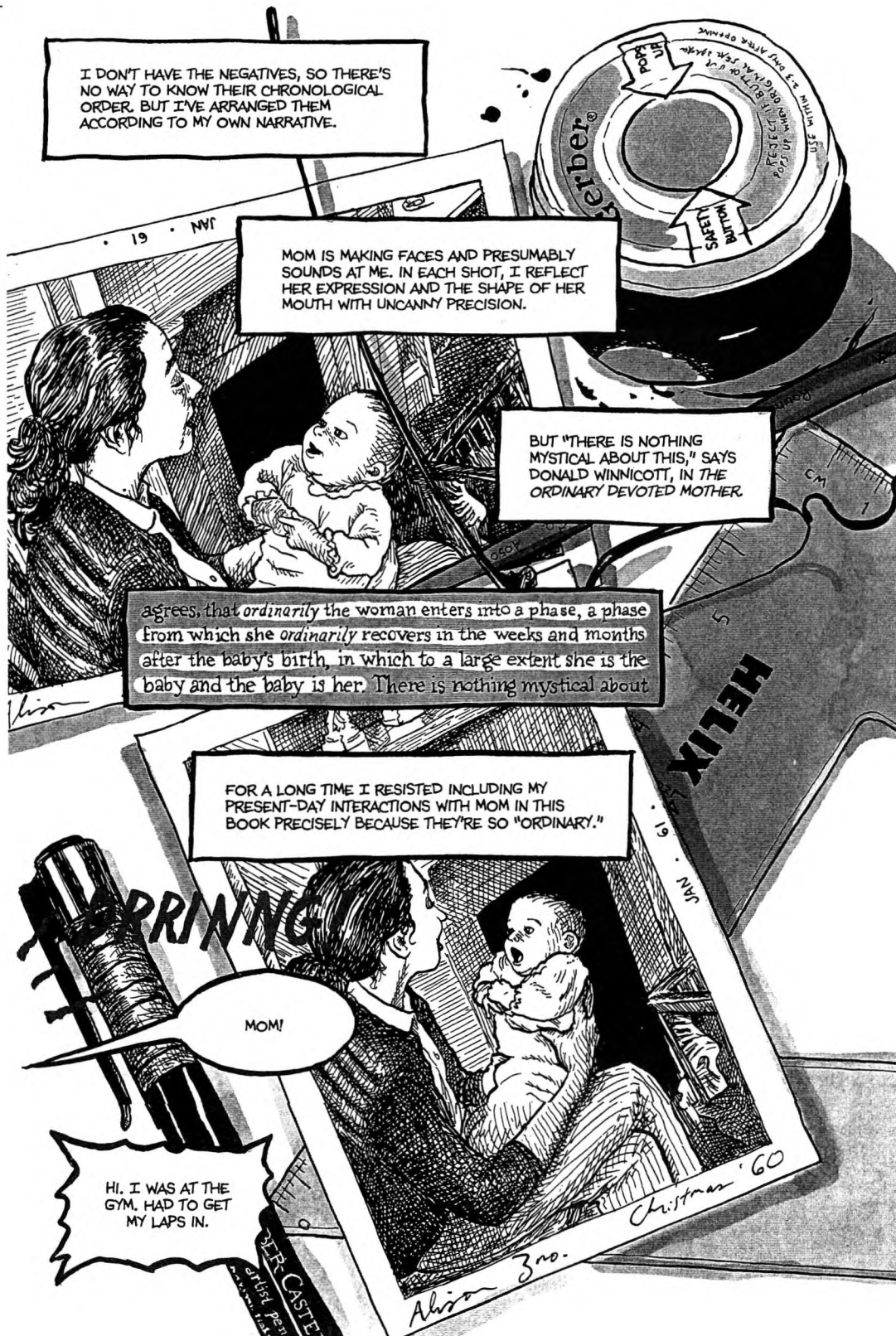
BUT "THERE IS NOTHING MYSTICAL ABOUT THIS," SAYS DONALD WINNICOTT, IN THE ORDINARY DEVOTED MOTHER.

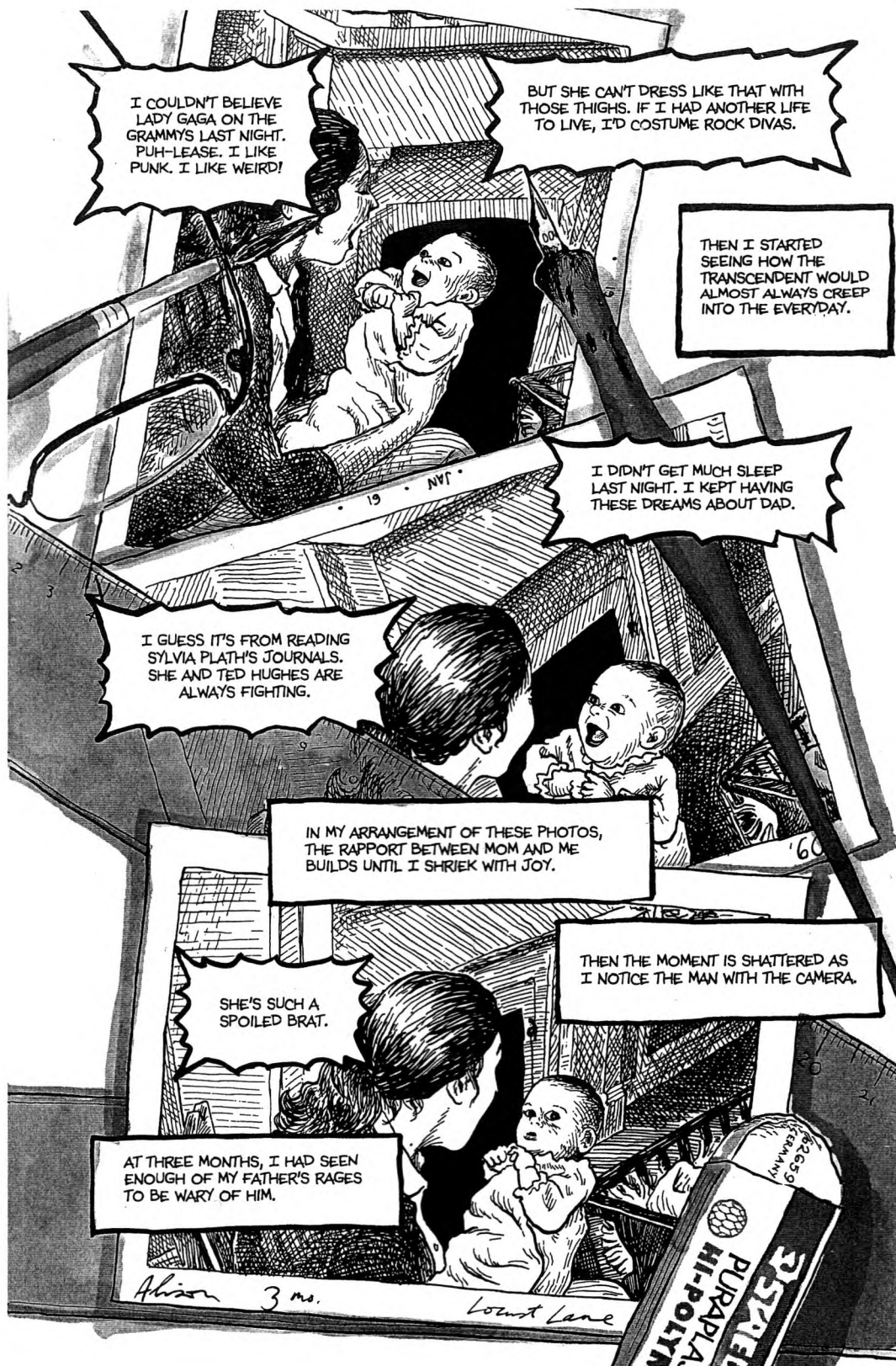
agrees, that *ordinarily* the woman enters into a phase, a phase from which she *ordinarily* recovers in the weeks and months after the baby's birth, in which to a large extent she is the baby and the baby is her. There is nothing mystical about

FOR A LONG TIME I RESISTED INCLUDING MY PRESENT-DAY INTERACTIONS WITH MOM IN THIS BOOK PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY'RE SO "ORDINARY."

MOM!

HI. I WAS AT THE GYM. HAD TO GET MY LAPS IN.





THE PHOTOS WERE TAKEN RIGHT ABOUT THE TIME MOM REALIZED THAT SHE WAS PREGNANT AGAIN.

SHE'S A SNOB, TOO. A SNOB AND A BRAT.

I THOUGHT YOU LIKED HER.

THERE ARE THREE MAIN REASONS, WINNICOTT SAYS, WHY A MOTHER MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO "GIVE HERSELF OVER TO THIS PREOCCUPATION WITH THE CARE OF HER INFANT."

SHE'S ALWAYS ASKING HER THERAPIST FOR PERMISSION TO HATE HER MOTHER.

ONE, SHE DIES. TWO, SHE "STARTS UP A NEW PREGNANCY BEFORE THE TIME THAT SHE HAD THOUGHT OUT AS APPROPRIATE." THREE...

THE ORDINARY DEVOTED MOTHER

ing. Or a mother becomes depressed and she can feel herself depriving her child of what the child needs, but she cannot help the onset of a mood swing, which may quite easily be reactive to something that has impinged in her private life. Here she is causing trouble, but no one would blame her.

In other words there are all manner of reasons why some children do get let down before they are able to avoid being wounded or maimed in personality by the fact.

Here I must go back to the idea of blame. It is necessary for us to be able to look at human growth and development, with all its complexities that are internal or personal to the child, and we must be able to say; here the ordinary devoted mother factor failed, without blaming anyone. For my part I have no interest whatever in apportioning blame. Mothers

"AM I ALLOWED TO HATE MY MOTHER?"

"NO!"

OH, SERENA'S GRANDDAUGHTER JUST GOT HER PERIOD. SHE'S ONLY TWELVE. THAT'S SO SAD. TWELVE IS TOO YOUNG.

UHH...I THINK TWELVE IS KINDA NORMAL.

I HAVE NOT BEEN MAIMED, ONLY WOUNDED, AND PERHAPS NOT IRREPARABLY.

her baby and in his or her care. At three or four months after being born the baby may be able to show that he or she knows what it is like to be a mother, that is a mother in her state of being devoted to something that is not in fact herself.

THE PICTURE OF ME LOOKING AT THE CAMERA FEELS LIKE A PICTURE OF THE END OF MY CHILDHOOD.



WELL, I'M HEARTBROKEN.
SHE WON'T BE A CHILD
ANYMORE.

"SHE IS THE BABY AND THE BABY IS HER." I DISAGREE THAT THERE IS NOTHING MYSTICAL ABOUT THIS.

No! (mom, as if she's SP's therapist
Serena's granddaughter just got h
is too young....

Well I'm heartbroken.

She won't be a child anymo

FOR TWO SEPARATE BEINGS TO
BE IDENTICAL---TO BE ONE...

ung...

heartbroken

n't be a child

...THIS SEEMS TO ME AS MYSTICAL,
AS TRANSCENDENT OF THE LAWS
OF EVERYDAY REALITY, AS IT GETS.

child

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. You might think of Bechdel's work as taking place in a series of frames, with each individual drawing existing in its own particular frame. Reread several pages of Bechdel's work and choose a single frame that seems layered and interesting to you. What do you notice about the frame Bechdel has created? What is the relationship between the words and images? How does the single frame exist as its own independent story? What is unique about reading a frame as opposed to reading, for example, a sentence or paragraph?
2. What do you imagine the composing process of this kind of work to be like? What does a graphic writer like Bechdel have to think about or consider that writers of only text might not consider? Try to create (even if you are not a particularly strong visual artist) a frame, or a few frames, of your own. What do you notice about the process? What is illuminated for you about the connections or distinctions between graphic composition and purely textual composition?
3. In the opening passages we've offered to this reading, Bechdel suggests that "delving" is important to her. In what ways do you see this work as an act of delving? What is it delving into? You might start by reading widely about the word *delve*. What is its definition and history? Your library will likely have access to the online Oxford English Dictionary, which is a good resource for such a task. Once you feel like you have a sense of the word's nuances and meanings, how would you put the term in conversation with Bechdel's work and her project?
4. In the first "Question for a Second Reading," we invited you to think about a single frame of Bechdel's piece. But you might also consider a set of frames in succession. Choose several frames that speak to each other in a way that builds a complex narrative. What does this set of frames ask of you as a reader? How does the work of a graphic writer, like Bechdel, teach a particular way of reading? What can this set of frames tell you about what it means to read this kind of piece?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Bechdel writes, "Of course the point at which I began to write the story is not the same as the point at which the story begins" (p. 75). We might read this statement as a commentary on the work of composing autobiography or memoir. She remarks later, "Another difficulty is the fact that the story of my mother and me is unfolding even as I write it" (p. 78).

Consider Bechdel's comments about writing this book and about herself. What does she seem to be suggesting about the difficulties of writing

autobiographical work? How would it be different if her work were composed of only words, or if it were a more conventional memoir of mother and daughter? How does her chosen form of graphic memoir enable and limit what she is able to do in writing about herself and her family?

Think of an autobiographical narrative you are familiar with, perhaps in literature or film. You might want to think of a story that involves a mother and daughter, like Bechdel's does. Write an essay in which you discuss the differences between this familiar narrative and Bechdel's work. In your discussion, you'll want to provide particular sets of frames or clusters from Bechdel's work and specific moments in the narrative with which you are familiar as examples. What is the relationship between the two autobiographical approaches? What does Bechdel's graphic work do that the other narrative does not do? What can you say about Bechdel's approach from looking at it alongside this other example?

2. Writing and reading are major themes in Bechdel's work. There's the story of Bechdel writing the very work we are reading. There is her journaling, her mother's journaling, and Bechdel's references to writers like Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. So one way of reading "The Ordinary Devoted Mother" is to understand the piece as being about reading and writing—and perhaps also about the life of the mind.

If you think of the piece as being about the work of reading and writing, what does Bechdel seem to suggest about what writing does, where it comes from, and what it is for? What is Bechdel's philosophy on reading and writing as far as you can tell? What does her work tell you about the process of its own making? Write an essay in which you offer Bechdel's theory of composition, making an argument for how Bechdel understands the creative process of writing.

3. Compose a piece of graphic memoir. Your piece need not be as long as Bechdel's, but you should think of yourself as imitating Bechdel, taking on her ways of composing. You can come up with your cartoon frames by either drawing them or, if you know how, constructing them digitally in whatever ways you can.

Once you've composed seven to ten frames, write an afterword in which you explore what you discovered in the process of trying to compose like Bechdel does. What was it like? How did the process reveal something to you about your own methods of composing? What did you learn from trying Bechdel's approach?



MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Bechdel's work seems particularly focused on the relationship between parents and children (whether those children are small or grown).

Imagine Bechdel's work in conversation with Susan Griffin's essay "Our Secret" (p. 351). How do both authors imagine the relationship between parenting and the selves we become? Which particular passages from both selections suggest this relationship to you?

Do Griffin and Bechdel appear to agree on how adult-child relationships work? How might you complicate or enrich each author's understanding of the ways parents shape the lives of their children? You may, in this question, draw from your own experiences as someone's child to help you think through these questions.

2. Both Alison Bechdel and Judith Butler are writers whose work is often studied in courses focused on gender and sexuality, as both authors are particularly interested in these aspects of identity. Return again to Butler's notion of being "beside oneself" in her essay of the same name (p. 182). Write your own essay in which you examine Bechdel's work through the lens of Butler's terminology. Is Bechdel "beside herself" as Butler defines it? How might reading Bechdel's work through Butler's terminology help us see another dimension of Bechdel's project?



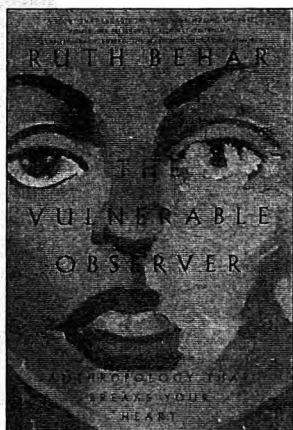
RUTH Behar

Ruth Behar (b. 1956) was born in Havana, Cuba, but grew up in New York after her family immigrated to the United States when she was four. Behar completed her undergraduate work at Wesleyan University in 1977 and earned a PhD in cultural anthropology at Princeton University in 1983. She is currently the Victor Haim Perera Collegiate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, where she regularly teaches courses on Cuba, cultural conceptions of home, ethnographic methodologies, and creative nonfiction. She has written that she views her field of cultural anthropology "as a humanistic pursuit whose purpose is to express the poetry of people's lives."

Behar is the author of five books — *The Presence of the Past in a Spanish Village: Santa María del Monte* (1986), *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993), *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (1996), *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba* (2007), and *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in between Journeys* (2013). Her award-winning documentary, *Adio Kerida / Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey*, which explores the dwindling Sephardic Jewish community in Cuba, was released in 2002.

In 1988, Behar became the first Latina to be awarded a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, and in addition to that honor, she has been awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Senior Fellowship, and a Distinguished Alumna Award from Wesleyan University. She is a frequently invited lecturer across the United States and around the globe.

Behar is famous for her acknowledgment of the subjective and emotional dimensions of ethnographic research, an acknowledgment that challenged the positivist interpretive paradigm that had historically been associated with work in anthropology. The excerpt that follows, which comes from her book *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, covers some of that territory. In it, Behar argues that ethnographers can never be fully detached from their subjects; she suggests that in conducting fieldwork, anthropologists might identify and work through their emotional investments in their subject and that being such a "vulnerable observer" might, in fact, afford valuable insights. As you read the excerpt, consider how Behar shares personal narrative to help convey her ideas.



.....

The Vulnerable Observer

It is customary to call books about human beings either tough-minded or tenderminded. My own is neither and both, in that it strives for objectivity about that tendermindedness without which no realistic behavioral science is possible.

—GEORGE DEVEREUX, *From Anxiety to Method*

In 1985 an avalanche in Colombia buried an entire village in mud. Isabel Allende, watching the tragedy on television, wanted to express the desperation she felt as she helplessly observed so many people being swallowed by the earth. In her short story "Of Clay We Are Created," Allende writes about Omaira Sánchez, a thirteen-year-old girl who became the focus of obsessive media attention. News-hungry photographers, journalists, and television camera people, who could do nothing to save the girl's life, descended upon her as she lay trapped in the mud, fixing their curious and useless eyes on her suffering. Amid that horrid audience of onlookers, which included Allende herself watching the cruel "show" on the screen, she places the photographer Rolf Carlé. He too has been looking, gazing, reporting, taking pictures. Then something snaps in him. He can no longer bear to watch silently from behind the camera. He will not document tragedy as an innocent bystander. Crouching down in the mud, Rolf Carlé throws aside his camera and flings his arms around Omaira Sánchez as her heart and lungs collapse.

The vulnerable observer par excellence, Rolf Carlé incarnates the central dilemma of all efforts at witnessing. In the midst of a massacre, in the face of torture, in the eye of a hurricane, in the aftermath of an earthquake, or even, say, when horror looms apparently more gently in memories that won't recede and so come pouring forth in the late-night quiet of a kitchen, as a storyteller opens her heart to a story listener, recounting hurts that cut deep and raw into the gullies of the self, do you, the observer, stay behind the lens of the camera, switch on the tape recorder, keep pen in hand? Are there limits — of respect, piety, pathos — that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But if you can't stop the horror, shouldn't you at least document it?

Allende assumed that once her story was published, Omaira would disappear from her life. But in *Paula*, her moving memoir of her daughter's sudden and rapid death from porphyria, she finds herself returning to Omaira's story, which has acquired the eerie power of fiction that foretells the future. This time, Allende is painfully close to tragedy, no television screen acting as buffer. Like Rolf Carlé, she must get "down in the mud" with her daughter, who has fallen into a coma, her gaze "focused beyond the horizon where death begins." Sitting at the bedside of Paula, a

Sleeping Beauty who will never awaken, Allende, with pen in hand, gives up the possibility of imagining other worlds through fiction. Surrendering to the intractableness of reality, she feels herself setting forth on "an irreversible voyage through a long tunnel; I can't see an exit but I know there must be one. I can't go back, only continue to go forward, step by step, to the end."¹

For me, anthropology is about embarking on just such a voyage through a long tunnel. Always, as an anthropologist, you go elsewhere, but the voyage is never simply about making a trip to a Spanish village of thick-walled adobe houses in the Cantabrian Mountains, or a garden apartment in Detroit where the planes circle despondently overhead, or a port city of cracking pink columns and impossible hopes known as La Habana, where they tell me I was born. Loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late, as defiant hindsight, a sense of the utter uselessness of writing anything and yet the burning desire to write something, are the stopping places along the way. At the end of the voyage, if you are lucky, you catch a glimpse of a light-house, and you are grateful. Life, after all, is bountiful.

But surely this is not the anthropology being taught in our colleges and universities? It doesn't sound like the stuff of which Ph.D.'s are made. And definitely it isn't the anthropology that will win you a grant from the National Science Foundation. Nor, to be perfectly honest, is it the anthropology I usually tell people I do. People, say, like my Aunt Rebeca, who is asking me — over a midnight snack of Cuban bread and *café con leche* in bustling Puerto Sagua, where people are devouring, as if there were no tomorrow, enormous plates of steak with browned onions and glistening plantains — why I went into anthropology.

No sé decirte cómo fué . . . I was very young. . . . I wanted to write. . . . A teacher had faith in me. . . . They gave me a fellowship to study anthropology. . . . I went to live in a Spanish village. . . . There I learned how to recite a rosary and heard my Sephardic ancestors whispering in my ears, "Shame, shame. . . ." Over the years this anthropology became a way to always be taking leave, a way to always be returning, a way to always be packing and unpacking suitcases, as if I were mimicking the history of our own family, traveling from Europe to the other America, to this America, this Puerto Sagua, not the one of the same name left behind on the island, but this one here where the Cuban bread and café con leche never run dry. . . ."

And then before I have answered her first question, my Aunt Rebeca asks, "Rutie, *pero dime*, what is anthropology?" While I hesitate, she confidently exclaims, "The study of people? And their customs, right?"

Right. People and their customs. Exactly. *Así de fácil*. Can't refute that. Somehow, out of that legacy, born of the European colonial impulse

to know others in order to lambast them, better manage them, or exalt them, anthropologists have made a vast intellectual cornucopia. At the anthropological table, to which another leaf is always being added, there is room for studies of Greek death laments, the fate of socialist ideals in Hungary and Nicaragua, Haitian voodoo in Brooklyn, the market for Balinese art, the abortion debate among women in West Fargo, North Dakota, the reading groups of Mayan intellectuals, the proverbs of a Hindi guru, the Bedouin sense of honor, the jokes Native Americans tell about the white man, the plight of Chicana cannery workers, the utopia of Walt Disney World, and even, I hope, the story of my family's car accident on the Belt Parkway shortly after our arrival in the United States from Cuba (the subject to which, in fact, we turned that night in Puerto Sagua, my Aunt Rebeca telling me they heard about it when they opened up the *Sunday Times* the next morning and, in shock, read the news).

Anthropology, to give my Aunt Rebeca a grandiose reply, is the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing left to us at the end of the twentieth century. As a mode of knowing that depends on the particular relationship

formed by a particular anthropologist with a particular set of people in a particular time and place, anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability. Clifford Geertz says, "You don't exactly penetrate another culture, as the masculinist image would have it. You put yourself in its way and it bodies forth and

**ANTHROPOLOGY . . . IS THE MOST
FASCINATING, BIZARRE, DISTURBING,
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enmeshes you."² Yes, indeed. But just how far do you let that other culture enmesh you? Our intellectual mission is deeply paradoxical: get the "native point of view," *pero por favor* without actually "going native." Our methodology, defined by the oxymoron "participant observation," is split at the root: act as a participant, but don't forget to keep your eyes open. Lay down in the mud in Colombia. Put your arms around Omaira Sánchez. But when the grant money runs out, or the summer vacation is over, please stand up, dust yourself off, go to your desk, and write down what you saw and heard. Relate it to something you've read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci, or Geertz and you're on your way to doing anthropology.

Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them. James Agee, sent by *Fortune* magazine on a mission to bring back an enticing story about dirt-poor farmers in the American South during the Depression, furiously wished he could tear up a clump of earth with a hoe and put that on the page and publish it. Instead, he wrote *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a troubled meditation about his fear of exploiting the lives of southern tenant farmers, which forms part of the very account in which he was trying, with an exaggerated sense of propriety and shame, to describe the contours of those same lives.

In different ways, writers like Agee and Allende arrive at that tender-minded toughmindedness which George Devereux suggested thirty years

ago should be the goal of any inquiry involving humans observing other humans. Devereux, an ethnopsychiatrist, believed that observers in the social sciences had not yet learned how to make the most of their own emotional involvement with their material. *What happens within the observer* must be made known, Devereux insisted, if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood. The subjectivity of the observer, he noted, "influences the course of the observed event as radically as 'inspection' influences ('disturbs') the behavior of an electron." The observer "*never* observes the behavioral event which 'would have taken place' in his absence, nor hears an account identical with that which the same narrator would give to another person." Yet because there is no clear and easy route by which to confront the self who observes, most professional observers develop defenses, namely, "methods," that "reduce anxiety and enable us to function efficiently." Even saying, "I am an anthropologist, this is fieldwork," is a classic form of the use of a method to drain anxiety from situations in which we feel complicitous with structures of power, or helpless to release another from suffering, or at a loss as to whether to act or observe.

Although he acknowledged the subjective nature of all social knowledge, for Devereux self-reflexivity was not an end in itself. Recognizing subjectivity in social observation was a means to a more important end — achieving significant forms of objectivity and therefore truly "true" science.³ Regardless of whether or not we aspire to science (and I, at least, do not), accepting Devereux's premise about the relentless subjectivity of all social observation still leaves us with a practical problem — How do you write subjectivity into ethnography in such a way that you can continue to call what you are doing ethnography? Should we be worried that a smoke alarm will blare in our ears when the ethnography grows perilously hot and "too personal"?

In *Works and Lives*, Clifford Geertz comes at this question by suggesting that ethnographies are a strange cross between author-saturated and author-evacuated texts, neither romance nor lab report, but something in between. Unlike Devereux, remaking anthropology into a better science is not Geertz's primary concern. Instead, Geertz considers the later phases of the ethnographic process, the moment of writing and the reception of the anthropologist's text. How is it, Geertz wants to know, that anthropologists (a handful of them, anyway) transfigure their observations of other people and places into such persuasive rhetoric that afterward those people and places are unimaginable except through the texts of their authors? As Geertz asserts, "One can go look at Azande again, but if the complex theory of passion, knowledge, and causation that Evans-Pritchard said he discovered there isn't found, we are more likely to doubt our own powers than we are to doubt his — or perhaps simply to conclude that the Zande are no longer themselves."

An anthropologist's conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the

present tense. The ethnography serves as the only proof of the anthropologist's voyage, and the success of the enterprise hinges on how gracefully the anthropologist shoulders what Geertz calls the "burden of authorship." The writing must convey the impression of "close-in contact with far-out lives."

Who decides if this goal has been achieved? Ultimately, says Geertz, the grounds for accepting one anthropologist's truth over another are extremely "person-specific" (not "personal," he insists, leaving the distinction obscure). For example, Oscar Lewis forcefully disputed the veracity of Robert Redfield's vision of life in Tepotzlán in his own restudy of the same Mexican town, but this did not make the Redfieldian text obsolete. On the contrary, by shifting attention to a diametrically opposed vision of the same people and place, Lewis only succeeded in proving that he and Redfield were *both* right, that they were "different sorts of minds taking hold of different parts of the elephant."⁴

Aware as he is that in anthropology everything depends on the emotional and intellectual baggage the anthropologist takes on the voyage, Geertz, like Devereux, still seems to me to embrace the cause of subjectivity with only half a heart. Devereux champions vulnerability for the sake of science. Geertz, in turn, repeatedly shows us that anthropology — as practiced by greats such as Lévi-Strauss, Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, and Benedict — is resolutely person-specific and yet somehow not "personal." Ironically, he reserves his harshest criticism for ethnographic writing that takes an autobiographical stance on the pursuit we call "fieldwork," this always going elsewhere, the voyage through the long tunnel. Geertz insists it is inappropriate to interiorize too much "what is in fact an intensely public activity."

But just how public an activity is the work of the anthropologist? Yes, we go and talk to people. Some of these people even have the patience and kindness and generosity to talk to us. We try to listen well. We write fieldnotes about all the things we've misunderstood, all the things that later will seem so trivial, so much the bare surface of life. And then it is time to pack our suitcases and return home. And so begins our work, our hardest work — to bring the ethnographic moment back, to resurrect it, to communicate the distance, which too quickly starts to feel like an abyss, between what we saw and heard and our inability, finally, to do justice to it in our representations. Our fieldnotes become palimpsests, useless unless plumbed for forgotten revelatory moments, unexpressed longings, and the wounds of regret. And so, even though we start by going public, we continue our labor through introspection. And then we go public again, and if the first time we dealt in something that came dangerously close to tragedy, the second time around we are definitely in the theater of farce as our uncertainty and dependency on our subjects in the field is shifted into a position of authority back home when we stand at the podium, reading our ethnographic writing aloud to other stressed-out ethnographers at academic conferences held in Hiltons where the chandeliers dangle by a thread and the air-conditioning chills us to the bone. Even

Geertz recognizes there is a problem: "We lack the language to articulate what takes place when we are in fact at work. There seems to be a genre missing."⁵

Consider this book a quest for that genre.

Fortunately, I am not alone in this quest.

What does it mean, for example, that an established professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, who co-authored a standard medical text on manic-depressive illness, should now choose to reveal, in a memoir, that she is herself a wounded healer, for she suffers from manic-depressive illness? In *An Unquiet Mind*, a memoir of moods and madness, Kay Redfield Jamison refuses to conceal her transformation of anxiety into method. She announces at the start of her book that she isn't sure what the consequences will be of giving public voice to her illness: "I have had many concerns about writing a book that so explicitly describes my own attacks of mania, depression, and psychosis, as well as my problems acknowledging the need for ongoing medication. Clinicians have been, for obvious reasons of licensing and hospital privileges, reluctant to make their psychiatric problems known to others. These concerns are often well warranted. I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues so openly will be on my personal and professional life but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of misspent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide."⁶

Later in the book, Jamison tells of her encounter with Mogens Schou, a Danish psychiatrist, who is responsible for the introduction of lithium as a treatment for manic-depressive illness. On a boat ride down the Mississippi River in New Orleans he asks her point-blank, "Why are you *really* studying mood disorders?" She hesitates to answer and he goes on to tell her why he has studied mood disorders — because of depression and manic-depressive illness in his family. "It had been this strong personal motivation that had driven virtually all of his research," and it is Mogens who encourages her, in turn, to use her own experiences in her research, writing, and teaching. Nevertheless, she continues to feel anxious: "Will my work now be seen by my colleagues as somehow biased because of my illness? . . . If, for example, I am attending a scientific meeting and ask a question, or challenge a speaker, will my question be treated as though it is coming from someone who has studied and treated mood disorders for many years, or will it instead be seen as a highly subjective, idiosyncratic view of someone who has a personal ax to grind? It is an awful prospect, giving up one's cloak of academic objectivity. But, of course, my work *has* been tremendously colored by my emotions and my experiences. They have deeply affected my teaching, my advocacy work, my clinical practice, and what I have chosen to study: manic-depressive illness."⁷

Not only is Jamison a wounded healer; she lives with the knowledge that, if her illness were to get out of control, she would cease to be able

to heal at all. With devastating honesty, she admits she has no guarantee she will remain healthy on a steady dose of lithium and therapy. As she remarks, "I know that I listen to lectures about new treatments for manic-depressive illness with far more than just a professional interest. I also know that when I am doing Grand rounds at other hospitals, I often visit their psychiatric wards, look at their seclusion rooms and ECT suits, wander their hospital grounds, and do my own internal ratings of where I would choose to go if I had to be hospitalized. There is always a part of my mind that is preparing for the worst, and another part of my mind that believes if I prepare enough for it, the worst won't happen."⁸

One of my colleagues, a medical anthropologist, tells me that the main reason Jamison is able to make herself so vulnerable at this moment in time is because of advances in the field of biochemistry, which have led to new understandings of the biochemical roots of depression, making it possible to control the illness through medical supervision and drugs. Science, in other words, has drained the shame out of depression. We saw that process at work when Colin Powell, at the press conference where he announced he wouldn't run for president, answered in quite measured tones, when the subject of his wife's depression was raised, that yes, indeed, she suffers from depression, but she is receiving medical treatment, just like he takes pills that control his blood pressure, "most of the time."

Yet if science makes it possible for the unspeakable to be spoken, if science opens borders previously closed, why is Jamison so anxious about her revelations? Why is she not more comforted by science? Like other scholars stretching the limits of objectivity, she realizes there are risks in exposing oneself in an academy that continues to feel ambivalent about observers who forsake the mantle of omniscience.

Increasingly, scholars are willing to take such risks. Among the interdisciplinary works emerging from this turn toward vulnerable observation, there is literary critic Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons*, which takes on her own fascination with the French language in the context of Jewish critical thinking about fascism, and the uneasy complicity of French writers who collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, historian Carolyn Kay Steedman offers an account of her mother's life that reveals the inability of British working-class history to account for her mother's resentful and unfulfilled desires for the things of the world. In *Dancing with the Devil*, anthropologist José Limón locates himself as a Chicano not only within his fieldwork but within the long history of military, folkloric, and anthropological representations of Mexicans in the United States, which precede his arrival in the field.⁹

No one objects to autobiography, as such, as a genre in its own right. What bothers critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts. Throughout most of the twentieth century, in scholarly fields ranging from literary criticism to anthropology to law, the reigning paradigms have traditionally called for distance, objectivity, and abstraction. The worst sin was to be

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"too personal." But if you're an African-American legal scholar writing about the history of contract law and you discover, as Patricia Williams recounts in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, the deed of sale of your own great-great-grandmother to a white lawyer, that bitter knowledge certainly gives "the facts" another twist of urgency and poignancy. It undercuts the notion of a contract as an abstract, impersonal legal document, challenging us to think about the universality of the law and the pursuit of justice for all.¹⁰

Of course, as is the case with any intellectual trend, some experiments work out better than others. It is far from easy to think up interesting ways to locate oneself in one's own text. Writing vulnerably takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of a complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly. I would say it takes yet greater skill. The worst that can happen in an invulnerable text is that it will be boring. But when an author has made herself or himself vulnerable, the stakes are higher: a boring self-revelation, one that fails to move the reader, is more than embarrassing; it is humiliating. To assert that one is a "white middle-class woman" or a "black gay man" or a "working-class Latina" within one's study of Shakespeare or Santería is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study. That doesn't require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied. Efforts at self-revelation flop not because the personal voice has been used, but because it has been poorly used, leaving unscrutinized the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and the observed.

Vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake. It has to move us beyond that eclipse into inertia, exemplified by Rolf Carlé, in which we find ourselves identifying so intensely with those whom we are observing that all possibility of reporting is arrested, made inconceivable. It has to persuade us of the wisdom of not leaving the writing pad blank.

The charge that all the variants of vulnerable writing that have blossomed in the last two decades are self-serving and superficial, full of unnecessary guilt or excessive bravado, stems from an unwillingness to even consider the possibility that a personal voice, if creatively used, can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues. Rather than facing the daunting

task of assessing the newly vulnerable forms of writing emerging in the academy, critics like Daphne Patai choose to dismiss them all as evidence of a "nouveau solipsism."¹¹

For Patai, my chapter on "the biography in the shadow" in *Translated Woman* is a case in point.¹² There I related my experience of getting tenure at Michigan within a study that explored the life story of Esperanza, a Mexican street peddler. I did so not to treat our struggles as equivalent but rather to show how different I am from Esperanza, because I had attained the privilege (indeed, not without a struggle) that allowed me to bring Esperanza's story across the border. I also reflected on how my Latina background affected my university's decision to grant me tenure. Officials first classified me as Latina because of my Cuban roots, then withdrew the identification because of my Jewish roots, and finally designated me a Latina again when they granted me tenure to boost their statistics on affirmative action hirings. This experience called into question my ability to depict Esperanza's mixed identity, on the one hand of Indian descent, on the other cut off from much of her Indian heritage by centuries of colonialism. Was my portrait of her as reductionist, shifting, even hurtful as the university's characterization of me?¹³

It is precisely this chapter, which upsets the academic critics, that has brought so many readers to my ethnography and made them want to listen to a Mexican peddler's life story. I have received several letters from women and men who say that relating my own story made the book whole for them. A woman of Welsh/German ancestry writes, "It's 10:30 at night and I'm crying. I've just finished your book *Translated Woman*, flipping between the last chapter and the footnotes, between my WASP life and my daughter's and yours and Esperanza's; I feel such gratitude for your (that's plural) courage and empathy in the arduous journey toward understanding that I'm writing my first ever fan letter at the age of 57." A Chicana anthropology student in Los Angeles told me the book empowered her doubly: she could see her mother in Esperanza and she could see herself in me. Another woman, of mixed Colombian and Puerto Rican background, told me in a letter: "I was so glad to hear you're exploring the dilemmas regarding positions of power and negotiation of entry that I too struggle with in doing ethnography. *Translated Woman* has brought both *you* and Esperanza to voice. You are both helping me come to voice, as well." A man in New York, who remembered we had been fellow students in college, wrote: "I was touched by the honesty and courage that I felt it took for you, an academic, to write a book as personal as this one."

What impresses me about these responses (besides, of course, the tremendous kindness of people who take the time to write such encouraging letters) is that readers need to see a connection between Esperanza and me, despite our obvious differences, and they need to see a connection back to themselves as well. In responding to my response to Esperanza, readers always also tell me something of their own life stories and their own struggles. Since I have put myself in the ethnographic picture,

readers feel they have come to know me. They have poured their own feelings into their construction of me and in that way come to identify with me, or at least their fictional image of who I am. These responses have taught me that when readers take the voyage through anthropology's tunnel it is themselves they must be able to see in the observer who is serving as their guide.

When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably. A different set of problems and predicaments arise which would never surface in response to more detached writing. What is the writer's responsibility to those who are moved by her writing? Devereux spoke in great detail of the observ-

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er's countertransference, but what about the reader's? Should I feel good that my writing makes a reader break out crying? Does an emotional response lessen or enhance intellectual understanding? Emotion has only recently gotten a foot inside the academy and we still don't know whether we want to give it a seminar room, a lecture hall, or just a closet we can air out now and then.

Even I, a practitioner of vulnerable writing, am sometimes at a loss to say how much emotion is bearable within academic settings. Last fall, at a feminist anthropology conference at the University of Michigan organized by the graduate students, I found myself in just such a dilemma as a new colleague prefaced her remarks by turning warmly toward me to say my work had given her permission to speak in ways that are taboo in the academy. Naturally I was flattered, but also I felt apprehensive. What would I find myself responsible for? She began to read, first from her ethnographic writing about spirit possession in India, giving detailed and thoughtful descriptions in a cool and controlled voice. Suddenly, she switched gears. Her tone grew passionate as she recounted her own experience of being brutally beaten by a former husband in a possession trance. She had not read this section of her work aloud before and her voice trembled. Soon the tears came to her eyes. She had to stop several times to catch her breath. By the end, she was sobbing.

The room was packed. All the available seats were taken and there were people standing in the back. In an effort to create a more feminist and egalitarian environment, the students had arranged the chairs in a circle, so there was a huge gaping hole, a cavern, in the middle of the room. When my colleague had finished speaking, a terrible silence, like a dark storm cloud, descended upon everyone. A part of me wished the cavern in the middle of the room would open up and swallow us all, so we wouldn't have to speak.

After what seemed an eternity, another anthropology colleague, in her kindest voice, tried to take charge of the situation by commenting on the

disparity between the two voices — the detached ethnographic voice and the exceedingly emotional personal voice. After a while, I too spoke, feeling obliged to speak. I took up where my colleague left off, and wondered aloud how we, as ethnographers, might go about writing emotion into the personal material without draining it all from the ethnography. My colleague, I realized, had made an all-too-common mistake, which I had come to recognize in my own writing: she paced her story in such a way that the ethnography moved along, steady, like a train cutting through a field, and then, *Boom! Bang! Crash!* There was the wrenching personal story of the suffering anthropologist. How, I asked — of my colleague and of myself — might we make the ethnography as passionate as our autobiographical stories? What would that take? And how might we unsettle expectations by writing about ourselves with more detachment and about others with all the fire of feeling? Can we give both the observer and the observed a chance at tragedy? As I spoke, people in the audience nodded their heads. Everyone seemed relieved that I, the champion of personal writing, was putting autobiography back in its place as the handmaiden of ethnography.

My new colleague had by this time calmed down and wiped away her tears. Even though I had responded sensibly and given her what everyone took to be a very constructive comment, I felt like I had failed her. What kept me glued to my chair, unable to rise and embrace her? Like Omaira Sánchez, she'd been in trouble. Unlike Rolf Carlé, I had watched her from a distance, sinking into the cavern in the middle of the room.

The image of my colleague, alone before the cavern, flashed before my eyes again when I was in Cuba early this year attending a women's conference about writing and art. A young writer, reading her fiction aloud for the first time, grew so nervous that her body shook convulsively. She tried to read, but she couldn't keep her hands still long enough to hold up her notebook. Immediately, one after another, the older, established writers present leaped to her side and put their arms around her. Soon, she was reading, still shaking but concentrating on her story. In fact, she went way over her time. After being politely asked to cut her reading short, she had become a furious prima donna. I felt she had lost her right to any sympathy. Later in the conference, another woman, talking about divided Cuban families, began to cry and could no longer go on speaking. This time the audience spontaneously began to applaud, louder and louder, as if to finish her sentence. Many of those clapping were crying, too.

In Michigan, all that emotion scared us, scared me. So we stayed quiet, like obedient schoolchildren waiting for the teacher to scold us. And, sadly, I became that teacher, ruler in hand, making my own knuckles bleed.

To write vulnerably is to open a Pandora's box. Who can say what will come flying out? When I began, nine years ago, to make my emotions part of my ethnography, I had no idea where this work would take me or whether it would be accepted within anthropology and the academy. I began with a sense of urgency, a desire to embed a diary of my life within

the accounts of the lives of others that I was being required to produce as an anthropologist. As a student I was taught to maintain the same strict boundary Malinowski had kept between his ethnography and his autobiography. But I'd reached a point where these forms of knowing were no longer so easily separated. And I came to realize that in much contemporary writing, these genres seemed to have exchanged places, ethnography becoming more autobiographical while autobiography had become more ethnographic.¹⁴ As I wrote, the ethnographer in me wanted to know: Who is this woman who is writing about others, making others vulnerable? What does she want from others? What do the others want from her? The feminist in me wanted to know: What kind of fulfillment does she get — or not get — from the power she has? The novelist in me wanted to know: What, as she blithely goes about the privilege of doing research, is the story she isn't willing to tell?

Unconsciously at first, but later with more direction, I chose the essay as a genre through which to *attempt* (the original meaning of *essai*, or essay) the dialectic between connection and otherness that is at the center of all forms of historical and cultural representation.¹⁵ The essay has been described as "an act of personal witness. The essay is at once the *inscription* of a self and *description* of an object." An amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other, the essay has been the genre of choice for radical feminists and cultural critics pursuing thick description.¹⁶ And perhaps too, through the essay, anthropologists can come closest to fulfilling those illicit desires, so frequently alluded to in Malinowski's diary, of longing to write poetry, fiction, drama, memoir, anything but ethnography, that second-fiddle genre we have inherited.¹⁷

The more colleagues called upon me to present my work at conferences, workshops, and public lectures, the more desperate I felt; time was being taken away from me to do the *really creative* writing I wanted to do. That *really creative* writing was being perpetually put on hold, perpetually postponed. So I began to write public performance pieces which were fringed with snatches of that other writing. These pieces — which I presented like a truant schoolgirl, hesitantly, apologetically, as failures to produce what I was expected to produce — called for an intellectual *and* emotional engagement from the listener.

Gradually I realized why I was acting like a truant schoolgirl: my anthropological mask was peeling off. Committed to speaking as a Latina, to speaking, therefore, from the margins rather than from the center of the academy, I was coming to see that I had been playing the role of the second-rate *gringa*. I felt uneasy with the entitlement I had earned, of being able to speak from the "macro" position, of being able to speak unequivocally and uncritically for others. At the same time, I began to understand that I had been drawn to anthropology because I had grown up within three cultures — Jewish (both Ashkenazi and Sephardic), Cuban, and American — and I needed to better connect my own profound sense of displacement with the professional rituals of displacement that are at

the heart of anthropology. As these ideas grew clearer in my mind, I found myself resisting the "I" of the ethnographer as a privileged eye, a voyeuristic eye, an all-powerful eye. Every ethnography, I knew, depended on some form of ethnographic authority. But as an ethnographer for whom the professional ritual of displacement continually evoked the grief of diaspora, I distrusted my own authority. I saw it as being constantly in question, constantly on the point of breaking down.

What first propelled me to try to write ethnography in a vulnerable way was the intense regret and self-loathing I felt when my maternal grandfather died of cancer in Miami Beach while I was away doing a summer's fieldwork in Spain. The irony was heightened by the fact that I had gone to Spain, knowing that my grandfather was dying, with a mission to gather material for an academic paper I'd been asked to write for a panel on "the anthropology of death." To talk about death with the aging peasant villagers who had initiated me into anthropology became at once a distressing exercise in surrealism and the most charged moment of empathy for the suffering of others that I have ever experienced. Hesitantly, I put down my first impressions in an early version of "Death and Memory" and presented it at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. The audience was moved, but I emerged shaken and uncertain. What had I done? By turning some of the spotlight on myself had I drawn attention away from "bigger" issues in the study of the anthropology of death? What was I seeking from my colleagues? Empathy? Pity? Louder applause?

I was so confused I put the essay away and returned to writing about women's witchcraft in eighteenth-century Mexico. Two summers later, in 1989, I pulled out the essay again. By then my status had shifted dramatically. I had won a major award that confirmed for my parents that they were right to leave Cuba. Michigan, in turn, granted me tenure, the immigrant dream of security. "Be grateful to this country," my mother said. "In Cuba you would have been cutting sugarcane." The daughter, at last, was reaping the rewards of her parents' displacement. It was a moment when I ought to have been happy, but I'd fallen into a state of mourning. I was mourning a loss for which I knew I deserved no sympathy — the loss of my innocence when I let Michigan toy with my most intimate sense of identity and buy me out. I didn't say a word about any of this in "Death and Memory." The essay drew its emotional force from the unspeakableness of my sorrow.¹⁸

Other essays, mixing the personal and the ethnographic, quickly followed. From Spain, I went to Mexico, where the whole course of my life and work changed as I felt in my own flesh how the border between the United States and Mexico is, in Gloria Anzaldúa's words, "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."¹⁹ *Translated Woman* is about a terrible irony: that Esperanza crosses the border as a literary wetback through my account of her life story. Yet, as I wrote *Translated Woman*, my friend Marta, also from Mexquitic, was settling down on this side of the border. In fact, she'd moved to Detroit, a half hour

away from my home in Ann Arbor, and become my "neighbor." The border, the unforgiving border of race and class, I discovered, doesn't begin in Laredo. Marta's parents back in Mexquitic, who had shared their heart and house with us, had asked me to keep an eye on Marta, to try to save her from the dangers they knew all too well existed on the other side. I wrote "My Mexican Friend Marta Who Lives Across the Border from Me in Detroit" out of anguish, because I feared I'd not lived up to my part of the friendship, because I'd not done enough to stop Marta from punishing herself, forcing herself to become modern, by having a hysterectomy at twenty-six.²⁰

Bill T. Jones has written that "all dance exists in memory." As he so lyrically put it, "The dancer steps, he pushes the earth away and is in the air. One foot comes down, followed by the other. It's over. We agree, dancer and watcher, to hold on to the illusion that someone flew for a moment." There is no physical evidence, says Jones. The material world is a place "that exists only in the moment, a place of illusion."²¹ And the body itself, as I show in "The Girl in the Cast," is a site of memory, a place of illusion that is crushingly real. "The Girl in the Cast," the most personal essay in this book, is a confrontation with the most bitter fate that can befall an anthropologist. It is about the anthropologist who can go nowhere, the anthropologist who has turned agoraphobic and is unable to move beyond her bed, the anthropologist who has lost her way in the long tunnel and, this time, is sure she will never find the exit.

The tunnel I grew lost in was the tunnel leading back to Cuba. I took a long detour, via Spain and Mexico, to get back to this place where my childhood got left behind. And now I despair that for me Cuba will become just another anthropological fieldsite. But it may well have to be that or nothing. The dilemma of going home, the place that anthropologists are always leaving from rather than going to, is the subject of "Going to Cuba." Nowhere am I more vulnerable than in Cuba and among Cubans as I search for a way to become a bridge between the island and the diaspora. As a "promoter" of cultural bridges, I have an almost diabolical power — I can obtain visas for island friends to visit the United States, some of whom will choose to defect, some of whom will return to the envy and spite of those who have not had the chance to see the world beyond the ocean. And I ask myself: Back home, in Cuba, have I, the returning immigrant child whose parents spared her from having to cut sugarcane, become the ugliest of border guards?

This anthropology isn't for the softhearted.

Nor is it for those who "marvel that anyone could choose a profession of such profound alienation and repeated loss."²² But that is not the worst of it. No, the worst of it is that not only is the observer vulnerable, but so too, yet more profoundly, are those whom we observe.

An example of such vulnerability can be seen in the Italian movie rendition of "The Postman," which stunningly evokes the deep impression that the poet Pablo Neruda made upon "an ordinary man" in a small

fishing village. The scene when this postman, his family, and neighbors pore over a foreign newspaper account of Neruda's sojourn in their village, expecting to find some mention of themselves, struck me as especially poignant in depicting the sense of loss and alienation experienced by those who took the poet-exile into their lives expecting that he, too, would take them into his own life with the same fullness of feeling. We anthropologists — merely poor relatives of Pablo Neruda — leave behind

our own trail of longings, desires, and unfulfilled expectations in those upon whom we descend. About that vulnerability we are still barely able to speak.

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ARE THOSE WHOM WE OBSERVE.**

Skeptics might reasonably ask: At a moment when the autobiographical voice is so highly commodified — most visibly in the talk shows of Oprah and Geraldo Rivera — shouldn't scholars write against the grain of this personalizing of culture rather than reproduce it? Indeed, a recent trend among some anthropologists is to work as overseers of large teams of assistants on big research projects, with themes ranging from multigenerational perspectives on women's perceptions of their bodies to the role played by race and class in achieving academic success among high school students of different ethnic groups. The tendency is to depersonalize one's connection to the field, to treat ethnographic work (only a small part of which is done personally by the principal investigator) as that which is "other" to the "self," and to accumulate masses of data that can be compared, contrasted, charted, and serve as a basis for policy recommendations, or at least as a critique of existing practices. This is not the only depersonalizing trend. A number of anthropologists accord prestige value to "high theory" and produce accounts that are starkly unpeopled about concepts like neocolonialism, transnationalism, and postmodernism, among other "isms." Still others, as I once did, have retreated to history, to the quiet of the archives and the study of the past, where presumably an observer can do less damage, not have to be quite so disturbingly present.

Clearly, vulnerability isn't for everyone. Nor should it be. Anthropology is wide-ranging enough to include many different ways of witnessing. But it seems to me that some of these depersonalizing trends reflect a fear that the personal turn in the academy has gone too far and must be stopped before all hell breaks loose. But hell, I fear, has already broken loose: autobiography has emerged, for better or worse, as the key form of storytelling in our time, with everyone doing it, from Shirley MacLaine to Colin Powell to professors of French and psychiatry. Isn't it a pity that scholars, out of some sense of false superiority, should try to rise above it all?

In anthropology, which historically exists to "give voice" to others, there is no greater taboo than self-revelation. The impetus of our discipline, with its roots in Western fantasies about barbaric others, has been

to focus primarily on “cultural” rather than “individual” realities. The irony is that anthropology has always been rooted in an “I” — understood as having a complex psychology and history — observing a “we” that, until recently, was viewed as plural, ahistorical, and nonindividuated.

Lately, anthropologists have been pushing at that irony, seeking another voice in anthropology that can accommodate complex I’s and we’s both here and there. This has led to a retheorization of genres like the life history and the life story, and the creation of hybrid genres like self-ethnography and ethnobiography. Personal narratives have a long tradition in anthropology, stemming from the studies of Native American cultures conducted by the first generation of anthropologists in the United States. The assumption behind the early quest for personal narratives was that native cultures had been broken, like ceramic pots, and the best you could do was study them in bits and pieces, from key individuals, who in telling their stories brought to light the disappearing, and often disappeared, lifeways of a group.²³

The genres of life history and life story are merging with the *testimonio*, which speaks to the role of witnessing in our time as a key form of approaching and transforming reality. Producing testimony became a crucial therapeutic tool in the treatment of people who suffered psychological trauma under state terrorism. It was practiced in Europe with Holocaust survivors, and in Latin America it was introduced in the 1970s as a way of helping people come to terms with the psychic and social effects of political repression on their lives. Its use spread to Central America and it became a key genre for the expression of consciousness-raising among indigenous women leaders. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* became the symbol of that movement, in which the purpose of bearing witness is to motivate listeners to participate in the struggle against injustice.²⁴

Another influence, in the United States, is the work of minority writers, like those included in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by the Chicana writers Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, which discussed experiences of racism and discrimination as well as of coming to ethnic consciousness. These first-person narratives, written by those who previously had been more likely to be the ethnographized rather than the ethnographer, challenged monolithic views of identity in the United States, asserted the multiplicity of American cultures, and deconstructed various orientalisms, challenging the assumption that the anthropologist was the sole purveyor of ethnographic truth. In turn, the renewed interest in the tradition of African-American autobiography, with its origins in the personal narratives of ex-slaves, spoke to the importance of telling the stories of the “black self” as a form of protest against racist images that too eagerly collectivized the individual nuances and diverse life trajectories within the African-American experience.²⁵

The last decade of meditation on the meaning of “native anthropology” — in which scholars claim a personal connection to the places in which they work — has opened up an important debate on what it means to be an insider in a culture. As those who used to be “the natives” have

become scholars in their own right, often studying their home communities and nations, the lines between participant and observer, friend and stranger, aboriginal and alien are no longer so easily drawn. We now have a notable group of "minority" anthropologists with a range of ambivalent connections to the abandoned and reclaimed "homelands" in which they work. The importance of this "native anthropology" has helped to bring about a fundamental shift — the shift toward viewing identification, rather than difference, as the key defining image of anthropological theory and practice. We no longer, as Clifford Geertz put it in a much-quoted phrase, strain to read the culture of others "over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong." We now stand on the same plane with our subjects; indeed, they will only tolerate us if we are willing to confront them face to face.²⁶

These shifts, in tandem with the feminist movement's assertion that the "personal is political," have changed the way scholars in a wide range of disciplines think about the subject and subjectivity of their work. Feminist writers within the academy have devoted a considerable amount of energy to reflecting on biography and autobiography, and the difficult question of how women are to make other women the subjects of their gaze without objectifying them and thus ultimately betraying them.²⁷ The rethinking of objectivity being carried out by feminists who study the sciences — among them Evelyn Fox Keller, Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, and Hillary Rose — has likewise put at the top of the agenda Devereux's dream of doing social science more subjectively so it will be more objective. As Sandra Harding puts it, "The beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research. *This* evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence."²⁸ Or, in the words of Donna Haraway, "Location is about vulnerability; location resists the politics of closure, finality."²⁹ At the end of the road for feminist science is a vision of utopia — where objectivity will be so completely revised that situated knowledges will be tough enough to resist the coups of dictatorial forms of thought.

Literary criticism has likewise been moving toward a more vulnerable and situated view of the critic's task. A famous early example is Jane Tompkins's "Me and My Shadow," a piece of literary criticism that is continually "disrupted" by reflections about the author's bodily presence as she writes — her stocking feet, looking out the window, deciding whether or not to go to the bathroom.³⁰ More recently, Susan Rubin Suleiman has reflected on these shifts: "When I was in graduate school at Harvard in the early sixties, it was understood that good academic writing — in my case, literary criticism — aimed for impersonality and objectivity. What did a poem or a novel or an essay mean? Or, if you were more sophisticated: How did a work mean, how was it 'put together' to produce a certain effect? These were the questions we were taught to ask, and the first rule we learned was that in answering them, one must never say 'I.' Nor, of course, should one make humorous remarks, or play on words, or try for 'literary' or 'poetic' effects, or in any other way seek to put one's self,

noticeably, into one's critical writing." Today, Suleiman claims, those rules no longer exist. "It is now all right to say 'I' in writing about literature. . . . The line between 'literature' and 'writing about literature' has itself begun to waver. . . . Some critics are now read as poets and novelists are read: not only for what they have to say, but for their personal voice and style." Her essays, Suleiman says, are not "straight autobiography," but "mediated autobiography," where the exploration of the writer's self takes place indirectly, through the mediation of writing about another, in her case, the work of writers and artists of the twentieth century.³¹

Such mediation is at the center of the new feminist biographical criticism. Toril Moi, for example, undertakes a thorough reading of Simone de Beauvoir's literary corpus to show how Beauvoir, far from being a perfect feminist role model, struggled to incarnate freedom. In Beauvoir's fiction, Moi notes, there is "always a woman who sacrifices her independence for love"; in her autobiographies, on the other hand, "the ideal of the autonomous woman is always present."³² Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre is examined closely and thoughtfully, and as Moi points out, Sartre's pact of freedom (basically, he traded two years of monogamy for a lifetime of infidelity) was paralleled by Beauvoir's myth of unity, the myth of the Sartre-Beauvoir couple.

That this myth often fell apart for Beauvoir was dramatized in the anxiety attacks witnessed by friends and acquaintances, in which she would burst into floods of tears in a café, and then just as suddenly she'd dry her tears, powder her face, straighten her clothes, and rejoin the conversation as if nothing had happened.³³ Yet Beauvoir refused Sartre's proposal of marriage and tried to overcome her "weakness" through strict schedules of walking and writing. She rejected the traditional bourgeois position of the married woman, but emotionally Beauvoir was bound to Sartre. Moi suggests that Beauvoir's depression, rooted in the fear of loss of love, caught up with her as she grew older, though she refused to pay it any attention. According to Moi, "On every page of her letters to Sartre she complains about her loneliness and emotional neediness *and* assures him that she is perfectly happy, totally satisfied with his love for her, and that she cannot wish for a better life. But this precisely is what Freud understands by disavowal. . . . Beauvoir both sees and does not see her own sorrow." Moi speculates that Beauvoir seemed "under a compulsion to repeat her cycles of depression, anxiety and fear of abandonment throughout her life. . . . Perhaps the presence of pain, in the end, felt more comforting to her than the fearsome emptiness of existential freedom?" Moi concludes that "Beauvoir poignantly conveys to us what it cost her to become a woman admired by a whole world for her independence."³⁴

Moi's feminist study of Beauvoir, like Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind*, is part of a torrent of new writing about women and depression. These writings range from popular psychological texts (Maggie Scarf's *Unfinished Business*) to academic psychological studies (Dana Crowley Jack's *Silencing the Self*) to memoirs about depression (*Washington*

Post reporter Tracy Thompson's *The Beast: A Reckoning with Depression*) to popular biographies (Diane Wood Middlebrook's *Anne Sexton*). In this literature there is a powerful implicit — and often also explicit — criticism of the North American male ethos of always keeping a stiff upper lip and pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. The women who write these accounts, whether about themselves or other women, point to weaknesses, are all too aware of dependencies, admit to the need for medication (lithium, Prozac), and allow themselves to be painfully honest — in ways that our great feminist heroine Simone de Beauvoir didn't dare — about how they deal with the emotional fallout of being intellectual women in the late twentieth century.

Vulnerability, in short, is here to stay. Critics can keep dismissing these trends as forms of "solipsism," but a lot of us are going to continue wearing our hearts on our sleeves. To what should we attribute these trends? Is it mere whining? Or have we entered, as they say in Cuba, *a special period*?

The brilliant and terrible shorthand, *el periodo especial*, began to be used in Cuba at the dawn of the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The cold war, it appeared, was over. The communist world was gone, toppled by free markets and capitalism. For Cuba, a defiant socialist island within spitting distance of the great capitalist mecca, which had depended on the socialist bloc for economic and ideological support, this was the beginning of the end. A wild scramble for food, fuel, and dollars ensued, and the key symbols of prerevolutionary decadence — tourism, prostitution, and foreign capitalist investment — returned with a vengeance. As doctors and dentists fixed up their cars and became cab drivers, and former revolutionaries swallowed their pride and dug up the addresses of their relatives in Miami to ask for a couple of dollars to buy cooking oil, the old revolutionary social values of reciprocity and laboring for the common good grew confused. What had the years of sacrifice — always for the sake of a messianic time not yet arrived — finally yielded? How had an island of utopian dreamers become so desperately vulnerable?

Cuba's *special period* epitomizes a more widespread loss of faith in master texts, master ideologies, steadfast truths, and monolithic ways of imagining the relation between self and community. In different ways, the rest of the world is also living through a special period. So many intellectual, political, socioeconomic, and emotional transformations are unfolding simultaneously as our century comes to a close. From the global arena to the intimate stirrings of the human heart, the disintegration of the old world order has provoked, as the writer Margaret Randall suggests, "a general reevaluation of stories we once accepted at face value, whatever

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our position in the fray."³⁵ New stories are rushing to be told in languages we've never used before, stories that tell truths we once hid, truths we didn't dare acknowledge, truths that shamed us.

As with the island of Cuba, everything has already happened and everything has yet to happen. And that is absolutely terrifying, but maybe, finally, it will prove absolutely liberating.

People and their customs. . . . I can hear my Aunt Rebeca asking: "Do you learn anything about Spaniards, Mexicans, Jews, Cubans, Jubans from reading these essays?" And I imagine myself replying, "Only insofar as you are willing to view them from the perspective of an anthropologist who has come to know others by knowing herself and who has come to know herself by knowing others. You should know that my one major vulnerability, my Achilles' heel, which I always thought was a problem in my becoming an anthropologist, is that I can't read a map. I'm the sort of person who gets lost just going around the corner. I think I got through school because they stopped teaching geography in American universities."

If you don't mind going places without a map, follow me.

NOTES

¹ Isabel Allende, *Paula* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 238, 310. Also see my review, "In the House of Spirits," in *Women's Review of Books* 13, 2 (November 1995): 8. Allende's story "Of Clay We Are Created" appears in *The Stories of Eva Luna* (New York: Macmillan, 1991). [All notes are Behar's.]

² Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

³ George Devereux, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 6, 84.

⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 5–6.

⁵ Geertz, *After the Fact*, 44.

⁶ Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 7.

⁷ Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind*, 188–189, 203.

⁸ Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind*, 212–213.

⁹ Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987); José E. Limón, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Daphne Patai, "Sick and Tired of Nouveau Solipsism," Point of View essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 23, 1994).

¹² Ruth Behar, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

¹³ See Gelya Frank, "Ruth Behar's Biography in the Shadow: A Review of Reviews," *American Anthropologist* 97, 2 (1995): 357–359, for an account of the controversy surrounding this chapter.

¹⁴ See the discussion of this point in Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁵ See the lucid discussion of representation in Michael S. Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 224.

¹⁶ The quotation, from Graham Good, is cited in Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres and Elizabeth Mittman, eds., *The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 20. This collection offers an excellent discussion of the

essay as a feminist genre. In anthropology, the essay has been innovatively used by Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); and Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). It has been championed as an ideal form for the new experimental ethnography by George E. Marcus, "Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern Worlds System," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 191. In turn, in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, pp. 11–12, Kamala Visweswaran makes the argument that the essay is a crucial medium for feminist ethnography.

¹⁷ On Malinowski and fiction, see Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 92–113, and Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, 4–5.

¹⁸ Later, I went on to write about Spain in relation to other losses and absences. The silencing of my Sephardic identity is the subject of my essay "The Story of Ruth, the Anthropologist," in Jeffrey Rubin-Dorksy and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, eds., *The People of the Book* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

²⁰ Earlier, I'd written about my daughter's guilt about my mother's hysterectomy. See "The Body in the Woman, the Story in the Woman," in Laurence A. Goldstein, ed., *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

²¹ Bill T. Jones, with Peggy Gillespie, *Last Night on Earth* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 246.

²² Barbara Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), x.

²³ See H. David Brumble, III, *American Indian Autobiography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), and Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). For more general discussion, see Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, eds., *Anthropology and Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

²⁴ Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, I, *Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984).

²⁵ Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1981); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Bearing Witness: Selections from African-American Autobiography in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

²⁶ On changing ideas of the "native" in anthropology, see the essays in Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). The quotation from Geertz is in his *Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 452.

²⁷ Among key works, see Susan N. G. Geiger, "Women's Life Histories: Method and Content," *Signs* 11 (1986): 334–351; Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life / Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); Personal Narratives Group, eds., *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Joanne M. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Nancy K. Miller, *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

²⁸ Sandra Harding, *Feminism and Methodology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

²⁹ Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 196.

³⁰ Jane Tompkins, "Me and My Shadow," in Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey, eds., *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).

³¹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

³² Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 218.

³³ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 225.

³⁴ Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir*, 250–252.

³⁵ Margaret Randall, "Who Lies Here?" (manuscript, 1996).

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Behar prefaces this piece with an epigraph from Hungarian-French anthropologist and psychoanalyst George Devereux's *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences* (1967). Devereux's text resonates with many of the arguments Behar goes on to make in her essay, and she returns to his ideas at several points throughout the piece. Take a moment to reread and think about the epigraph from Devereux. What does it mean? Why do you think that Behar decided to start her text with this epigraph? How does it shape how you read the rest of the piece? Read back through Behar's text and identify moments where you see Behar expressing ideas similar to the ones found in the quote from Devereux.
2. In this excerpt, Behar formally cites and casually refers to a lot of writers, academics, and theorists — George Devereux, Isabel Allende, Clifford Geertz, Max Weber, Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, James Agee, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gloria Anzaldúa, Donna Haraway, and Jane Tompkins, to name just a few. Some of these names might be familiar to you, but others might be less so. Reread the essay, and mark the places where Behar references other thinkers. Try to name and describe the various purposes Behar has for bringing in these different figures. What do these citations allow her to do? Does she use all of them for similar reasons? Are there some sources that are used in dramatically different ways than the rest?

After spending time thinking about the rhetorical functions accomplished by Behar's citations, take some time to look up a few of these figures cited by Behar. Are there any commonalities between them? How does having some additional information about who these thinkers are and when they were writing and working shape how you understand Behar's citation of them? How does this information change how you read and understand the essay?

3. Behar doesn't just make an argument about vulnerability and the ways that one's subjectivity affects the academic research and writing process; instead, she composes an essay that embodies her argument, demonstrating vulnerability and acknowledging how her subjective experience has shaped the composition of both this piece and other work she has produced. Read back through the essay and identify moments where Behar makes herself vulnerable or showcases how her vulnerability and subjectivity have shaped her ideas and her writing. How do these moments shape how you feel about Behar? How do they shape how you understand her ideas? How would the piece be different if she had utilized a more steeled, more detached and "objective" style to convey her ideas? What might that look like?

4. A little over halfway through the text, Behar discusses how her different identities — as an ethnographer, a feminist, and a novelist — inform her thinking and research:

As I wrote, the ethnographer in me wanted to know: Who is this woman who is writing about others, making others vulnerable? What does she want from others? What do the others want from her? The feminist in me wanted to know: What kind of fulfillment does she get — or not get — from the power she has? The novelist in me wanted to know: What, as she blithely goes about the privilege of doing research, is the story she isn't willing to tell? (p. 120)

Part of Behar's reason for discussing this is likely to showcase how all of us have multiple identities (each with their own stylistic voices, concerns, and commitments) that shape our work. Take a moment to read back through the essay and see if you can identify moments where you see these different identities coming out more strongly and overwhelming the others. Where is Behar's identity as an ethnographer especially visible to you? Where are the places where her commitments as a feminist can be clearly observed? How do you see novelistic flourishes at work? Identify the moments in the essay where you see Behar dealing with conflicts between these different identities. In addition to the three separate identities named in the above passage, what other identities do you see shaping Behar's writing and thinking throughout the piece?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Early on in the essay, Behar discusses the anxieties many academic writers feel about acknowledging their personal investment in or relation to the subjects about which they are writing. Behar cites Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind* as a text that deals with these anxieties extensively. Jamison asks some very difficult questions:

Will my work now be seen by my colleagues as somehow biased because of my illness? . . . If, for example, I am attending a scientific meeting and ask a question, or challenge a speaker, will my question be treated as though it is coming from someone who has studied and treated mood disorders for many years, or will it instead be seen as a highly subjective, idiosyncratic view of someone who has a personal ax to grind? (Jamison as cited in Behar, p. 114).

Think about a moment in your life when you worried that your impartiality or investment in an issue might have affected how you were interpreting a situation or how your interpretation of a situation might be read and interpreted by others. Write an essay about that experience, the limits of objectivity, and the potential value and usefulness of subjective experience. Engage with passages from Behar and perhaps also from Jamison to help you explore these issues and the personal example you are using. Though this

assignment asks you to identify an experience similar to those of Behar and Jamison, be mindful of the differences between your experiences and theirs. You might even discuss how those differences shape the meaning and significance of the narratives that construct your life and theirs.

2. Though Behar's essay can be read as arguing for the incorporation of the personal into academic writing, she also argues that such work is only valuable if deep connections between the personal and the subject at hand can be made. This argument can be seen clearly in the following quote:

To assert that one is a "white middle-class woman" or a "black gay man" or a "working-class Latina" within one's study of Shakespeare or Santería is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study. That doesn't require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied. (p. 116)

Continuing, Behar explains, "Vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake" (p. 116).

Write an essay in which you reflect on and react to Behar's arguments about when and how the personal should be deployed in academic writing. As you reflect on these issues, look more closely at the examples Behar includes in her own text and consider whether she always follows her own advice. In writing your essay, question whether you agree with her argument. Would you revise it in any way? What other examples in Behar's text might showcase other reasons for the demonstration of vulnerability and the use of the personal in academic writing? What other examples or rhetorical situations can you imagine that might do so?

3. Behar spends a significant amount of time throughout this selection discussing the genres she has explored and the one she has eventually settled on — the essay. As Behar explains, "Unconsciously at first, but later with more direction, I chose the essay as a genre through which to *attempt* (the original meaning of *essai* or essay) the dialectic between connection and otherness that is at the center of all forms of historical and cultural representation" (p. 120). Behar goes on to explain that the essay is "an amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other, [which] has been the genre of choice for radical feminists and cultural critics pursuing thick description" (p. 120).

Behar's discussion of the etymology of the word *essay*, emerging from the French infinitive *essayer*, meaning "to attempt" or "to try," might be unfamiliar to you and different from how you have conceptualized the "essay." Write an essay that explores this denotative definition of the word *essay*, in which you attempt to understand the significance and potential

uses of that definition for writers like Behar and for the “radical feminists and cultural critics” Behar associates herself with. Why might the form, conceived of in such a way, be of use to such writers? What does it allow for? In your essay, also consider how Behar’s employment of that understanding of the genre is reflected in her text, both in terms of the type of argument and structure she utilizes and in terms of the stylistic features she relies on in her writing.

4. Late in the text, Behar discusses concerns of potential critics of the kind of autobiographical exploration she puts forth. She acknowledges that “skeptics might reasonably ask: At a moment when the autobiographical voice is so highly commodified — most visibly in the talk shows of Oprah and Geraldo Rivera — shouldn’t scholars write against the grain of this personalizing of culture rather than reproduce it?” (p. 123).

This piece was published in 1996, and one might convincingly argue that in the years since its publication the highly commodified autobiographical voices that Behar and her critics worried about have only increased in number and become magnified with the growth of talk shows, reality TV, and the development of online social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Write an essay that explores how the type of commodified (and often narcissistic) autobiographical voice that shapes so much of our daily lives differs from the type of autobiographical voice that Behar advocates. Use ideas and examples from Behar’s text to help you make your point. In your essay, think about how Behar might respond to the changing nature of autobiography and new forms of vulnerability in the digital age. In what ways might the new genres available in the digital age allow for the types of meaningful connections between personal lives and scholarly subjects that Behar hopes to see? To add another layer of insight in your essay, you might consider how Behar uses digital spaces today (her personal website, Twitter account, etc.).

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. I’m a first-generation college student, here by fluke on fellowship, and the theorists’ English seems foreign to me, filled with jargon and abstractions at which I can only guess. They say nothing about wife-beating or rape or unequal wages or child molesting, which is the charge that finally got my stepfather sent to prison. They say nothing about being a single mother on ten thousand dollars a year, which is my own situation. The feminist writers respond to male theorists — Lacan, Derrida — whose work I haven’t read. I can’t parse their sentences or recognize their allusions, and I don’t know what they mean or how they’re helpful to the strippers and dropouts and waitresses I know, the women I care about the most, to my aunt Lettie who worked the register at Winn-Dixie and my aunt Linda who cleaned houses.

It's true that the complexity and jargon are alluring, like another country, safe and leisured, with a strange, beautiful language that means only abstract things, where a dozen bright young women and their interlocutor can spend three hours conversing around a big table in a comfortable, air-conditioned room that looks like a corporate boardroom in a movie. (p. 213)

—JOY CASTRO, "On Becoming Educated"

No one objects to autobiography, as such, as a genre in its own right. What bothers critics is the insertion of personal stories into what we have been taught to think of as the analysis of impersonal social facts. (p. 115)

—RUTH BEHAR, "The Vulnerable Observer"

Both Behar and Castro write about the erasure of subjective experience that too often occurs in academia. The two quotes above approach this problem from different directions, with Castro considering how the disconnection between the academy and the world of her personal experience affected her as a student and Behar exploring how the genre conventions and history of her discipline have shaped how she writes and is received by others in the academy.

Write an essay that puts Behar and Castro in conversation about the ways the personal and the academic both intersect and diverge; consider how each writer showcases the potential values and consequences of both the connections and disconnections between the personal and the academic. Additionally, consider how the genres, audiences, and rhetorical purposes of these two writers differ. What similarities and differences do you see between their styles? How are their messages similar? How are their messages different? Are these writers speaking to similar or different audiences? Do they have similar goals? What can we learn by juxtaposing these writers and thinking about one of their projects in light of, or through the lens of, the other?

2. Early in the piece, Behar describes anthropology as "the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing" (p. 111). The problem, though, as Behar goes on to explain, is figuring out how to convey that experience of witnessing after the witnessed event has occurred. Behar describes that problem: "An anthropologist's conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense" (pp. 112–13).

Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature" (p. 436) can also be read as an essay about the problems of witnessing and representation. Write an essay that compares how these two authors approach witnessing and representation in different ways. How do they understand these acts and the problems they present in fundamentally different ways? How do they see the impacts of previous knowledge and subjective experiences? In what ways are their approaches to recovery from these problems similar and different? How might the subjects that each of these writers is exploring shape their attitudes?

3. In the passage below, Behar discusses the process by which she came to write more vulnerably, to incorporate the personal into the writing she was producing:

I began with a sense of urgency, a desire to embed a diary of my life within the accounts of the lives of others that I was being required to produce as an anthropologist. As a student I was taught to maintain the same strict boundary Malinowski had kept between his ethnography and his autobiography. But I'd reached a point where these forms of knowing were no longer so easily separated. And I came to realize that in much contemporary writing, these genres seemed to have exchanged places, ethnography becoming more autobiographical while autobiography had become more ethnographic. (pp. 119–20)

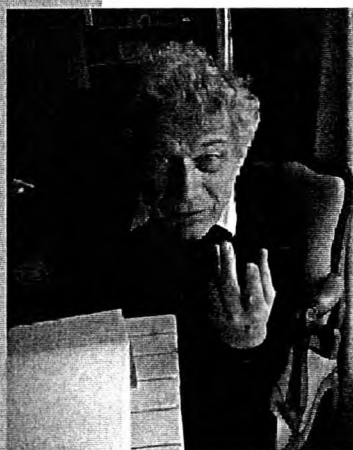
Though discussing a much different topic, Judith Butler, in "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," also writes about how accounts of selves and others slip back and forth and in and out of one another, about how Self and Other become fundamentally entangled. Butler explains:

I might try to tell a story about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very 'I' who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling. The very 'I' is called into question by its relation to the one to whom I address myself. This relation to the Other does not precisely ruin my story or reduce me to speechlessness, but it does, invariably clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. (p. 183)

Later, Butler goes on to question and explore why this happens:

Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. Indeed, if I seek to deny the fact that my body relates me — against my will and from the start — to others I do not choose to have in proximity to myself . . . , and if I build a notion of "autonomy" on the basis of the denial of this sphere or a primary and unwilling physical proximity with others, then do I precisely deny the social and political conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? If I am struggling *for* autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impressing them as well, and in ways that are not always clearly delineable, in forms that are not fully predictable? (p. 185)

Spend some time rereading this section from Butler and then write an essay that approaches Behar's "Vulnerable Observer" through the lens of Butler's theories about self/other relations and autonomy. How might Butler's theories complicate our understandings of the relations between researchers and the people they observe? What might Butler say about the traditional conceptions of the objective and detached observer that Behar is working against?



JOHN Berger

John Berger (1926–2017), like few other art critics, elicits strong and contradictory reactions to his writing. He has been called (sometimes in the same review) “preposterous” as well as “stimulating,” “pompous” yet “exciting.” He has been accused of falling prey to “ideological excesses” and of being a victim of his own “lack of objectivity,” but he has been praised for his “scrupulous” and “cogent” observations on art and culture. He was one of Europe’s most influential Marxist critics, yet his work has been heralded and damned by leftists and conservatives alike. Although Berger’s work speaks powerfully, its tone is quiet, thoughtful, measured. According to the poet and critic Peter Schjeldahl, “The most mysterious element in Mr. Berger’s criticism has always been the personality of the critic himself, a man of strenuous conviction so loath to bully that even his most provocative arguments sit feather-light on the mind.”

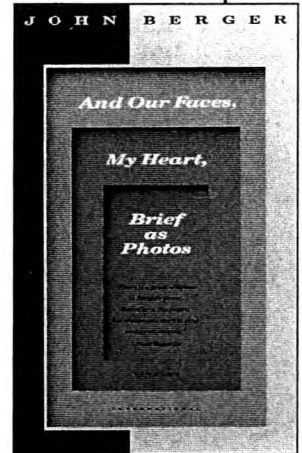
The first selection is Chapter 1 from *Ways of Seeing* (1972), a book that began as a series on BBC Television. In fact, the show was a forerunner of those encyclopedic television series later popular on public television stations in the United States: *Civilization*, *The Ascent of Man*, *Cosmos*, *The Civil War*. Berger’s show was less glittery and ambitious, but it was more serious in its claims to be educational. As you watched the screen, you saw a series of images (like those in the following text). These were sometimes presented with commentary, but sometimes in silence, so that you constantly saw one image in the context of another—for example, classic presentations of women in oil paintings interspersed with images of women from contemporary art, advertising, movies, and “men’s magazines.” The goal of the exercise, according to Berger, was to “start a process of questioning,” to focus his viewer’s attention not on a single painting in isolation but on “ways of seeing” in general, on the ways we have learned to look at and understand the images that surround us, and on the culture that teaches us to see things as we do. The method of *Ways of Seeing*, a book of art history, was used by Berger in another book, *A Seventh Man* (1975), to document the situation of the migrant worker in Europe.

After the chapter from *Ways of Seeing*, we have added two brief passages from a beautiful, slight, and quite compelling book by Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos* (1984). This book is both a meditation on time and space and a long love letter (if you can imagine such a combination!). At

several points in the book, Berger turns his (and his reader's) attention to paintings. We have included two instances, his descriptions of Rembrandt's *Woman in Bed* and Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew* (and we have included reproductions of the paintings). We offer these as supplements to *Ways of Seeing*, as additional examples of how a writer turns images into words and brings the present to the past.

Berger has written poems, novels, essays, and film scripts, including *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (1965), *A Fortunate Man* (1967), *G.* (1971), and *About Looking* (1980). He lived and worked in England for years, but he spent the last decades of his life in Quincy, a small peasant village in Haute-Savoie, France, where he wrote, over the course of several years, a trilogy of books on peasant life, titled *Into Their Labours*. The first book in the series, *Pig Earth* (1979), is a collection of essays, poems, and stories set in Haute-Savoie. The second, *Once in Europa* (1987), consists of five peasant tales that take love as their subject. The third and final book in the trilogy, *Lilac and Flag: An Old Wives' Tale of the City* (1990), is a novel about the migration of peasants to the city. His most recent books include four essay collections, *The Shape of the Pocket* (2001), *Selected Essays* (2001), *Portraits: John Berger on Artists* (2015), and *Confabulations* (2016); *Here Is Where We Meet: A Fiction* (2005), a series of autobiographical vignettes; *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance* (2007), a meditation on political resistance; *Why Look at Animals?* (2009), essays on the relationship between humans and animals; and *Bento's Sketchbook* (2011), a meditation on the practice of drawing.

Note: The paintings referenced in Berger's essays are, of course, in color, while our reproductions are in black and white. All of these images can be found online in full-color reproductions. We recommend that you track down at least some of them.



Ways of Seeing

Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.

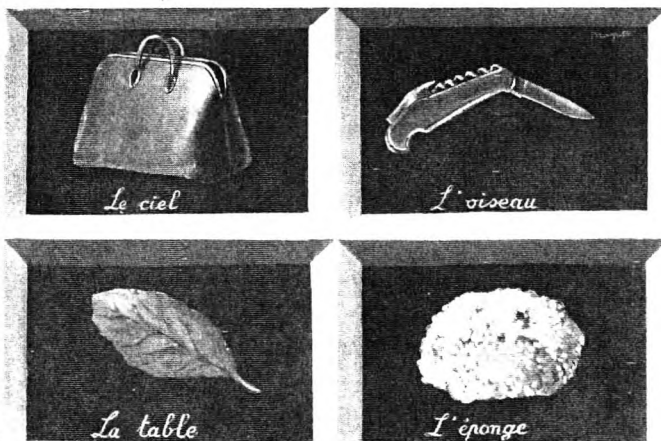
But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we *see* the sun set. We *know* that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight. The Surrealist painter Magritte commented on this always-present gap between words and seeing in a painting called *The Key of Dreams*.

The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. In the Middle Ages when men believed in the physical existence of Hell the sight of fire must have meant something different from what it means today. Nevertheless their idea of Hell owed a lot to the sight of fire consuming and the ashes remaining — as well as to their experience of the pain of burns.

When in love, the sight of the beloved has a completeness which no words and no embrace can match: a completeness which only the act of making love can temporarily accommodate.

Yet this seeing which comes before words, and can never be quite covered by them, is not a question of mechanically reacting to stimuli. (It can only be thought of in this way if one isolates the small part of the process which concerns the eye's retina.) We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within

our reach — though not necessarily within arm's reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it. (Close your eyes, move round the room and notice how the faculty of touch is like a static, limited form of sight.) We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active,



René Magritte, "The Key to Dreams," 1927/bpk, Berlin/Art Resource, NY/© 2016 C. Herscovici/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The Key of Dreams by Magritte [1898–1967].

continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.

Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world.

If we accept that we can see that hill over there, we propose that from that hill we can be seen. The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue. And often dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this — an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally, “you see things,” and an attempt to discover how “he sees things.”

In the sense in which we use the word in this book, all images are man-made [see below]. An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved — for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights.

This is true even in the most casual family snapshot. The photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject.

The painter’s way of seeing is reconstituted

by the marks he makes on the canvas or paper. Yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing. (It may be, for example, that Sheila is one figure among twenty; but for our own reasons she is the one we have eyes for.)

EVERY IMAGE EMBODIES A WAY OF SEEING. EVEN A PHOTOGRAPH.



Images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked — and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. Later still the specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. An image became a record of how X had seen Y. This was the result of an increasing consciousness of individuality, accompanying an increasing awareness of history. It would be rash to try to date this last development precisely. But certainly in Europe such consciousness has existed since the beginning of the Renaissance.

No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect images are more precise and richer than literature. To say this is not to deny the expressive or imaginative quality of art, treating it as mere documentary evidence; the more imaginative the work, the more profoundly it allows us to share the artist's experience of the visible.

Yet when an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learned assumptions about art. Assumptions concerning:

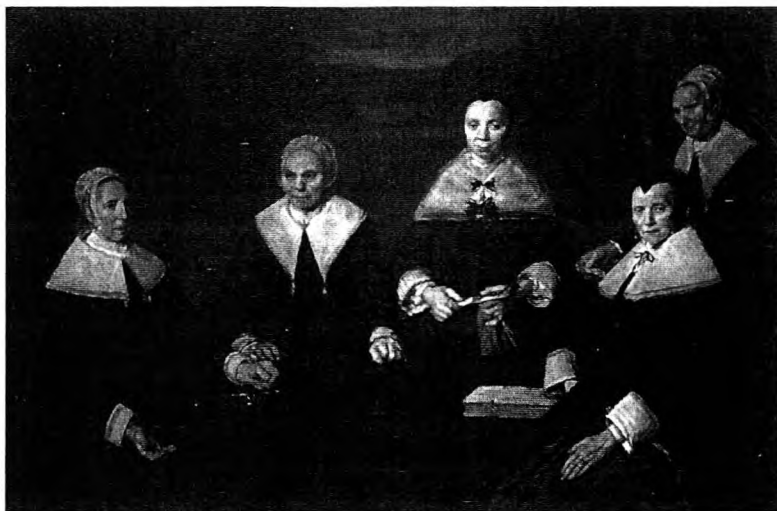
Beauty
Truth
Genius
Civilization
Form
Status
Taste, etc.

Many of these assumptions no longer accord with the world as it is. (The world-as-it-is is more than pure objective fact, it includes consciousness.) Out of true with the present, these assumptions obscure the past. They

Regents of old men's almshouse of Harlem, 1664, by Frans Hals (circa 1581-1666), oil on canvas, Hals, Frans (1582/3-1666)/Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands/De Agostini Picture Library/Bridgeman Images



Regents of the Old Men's Alms House by Hals [1580-1666].



Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands/Album/Art Resource, NY

Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House by Hals [1580–1666].

mystify rather than clarify. The past is never there waiting to be discovered, to be recognized for exactly what it is. History always constitutes the relation between a present and its past. Consequently fear of the present leads to mystification of the past. The past is not for living in; it is a well of conclusions from which we draw in order to act. Cultural mystification of the past entails a double loss. Works of art are made unnecessarily remote. And the past offers us fewer conclusions to complete in action.

When we “see” a landscape, we situate ourselves in it. If we “saw” the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history. When we are prevented from seeing it, we are being deprived of the history which belongs to us. Who benefits from this deprivation? In the end, the art of the past is being mystified because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes, and such a justification can no longer make sense in modern terms. And so, inevitably, it mystifies.

Let us consider a typical example of such mystification. A two-volume study was recently published on Frans Hals.¹ It is the authoritative work to date on this painter. As a book of specialized art history it is no better and no worse than the average.

The last two great paintings by Frans Hals portray the Governors and the Governesses of an Alms House for old paupers in the Dutch seventeenth-century city of Haarlem. They were officially commissioned portraits. Hals, an old man of over eighty, was destitute. Most of his life he had been in debt. During the winter of 1664, the year he began painting these pictures, he obtained three loads of peat on public charity, otherwise he would have frozen to death. Those who now sat for him were administrators of such public charity.

The author records these facts and then explicitly says that it would be incorrect to read into the paintings any criticism of the sitters. There is

no evidence, he says, that Hals painted them in a spirit of bitterness. The author considers them, however, remarkable works of art and explains why. Here he writes of the Regentesses:

Each woman speaks to us of the human condition with equal importance. Each woman stands out with equal clarity against the *enormous* dark surface, yet they are linked by a firm rhythmical arrangement and the subdued diagonal pattern formed by their heads and hands. Subtle modulations of the *deep*, glowing blacks contribute to the *harmonious fusion* of the whole and form an *unforgettable contrast* with the *powerful* whites and vivid flesh tones where the detached strokes reach a *peak of breadth and strength*. [Berger's italics]

The compositional unity of a painting contributes fundamentally to the power of its image. It is reasonable to consider a painting's composition. But here the composition is written about as though it were in itself the emotional charge of the painting. Terms like *harmonious fusion*, *unforgettable contrast*, reaching a *peak of breadth and strength* transfer the emotion provoked by the image from the plane of lived experience, to that of disinterested "art appreciation." All conflict disappears. One is left with the unchanging "human condition," and the painting considered as a marvellously made object.

Very little is known about Hals or the Regents who commissioned him. It is not possible to produce circumstantial evidence to establish what their relations were. But there is the evidence of the paintings themselves: the evidence of a group of men and a group of women as seen by another man, the painter. Study this evidence and judge for yourself.

The art historian fears such direct judgment:

As in so many other pictures by Hals, the penetrating characterizations almost seduce us into believing that we know the personality traits and even the habits of the men and women portrayed.

Both images: Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands/
Album/Art Resource, NY



What is this "seduction" he writes of? It is nothing less than the paintings working upon us. They work upon us because we accept the way Hals saw his sitters. We do not accept this innocently. We accept it in so far as it corresponds to our own observation of people, gestures, faces, institutions. This is possible because we still live in a society of comparable social relations and moral values. And it is precisely this which gives the paintings their psychological and social urgency. It is this — not the painter's skill as a "seducer" — which convinces us that we *can* know the people portrayed.

The author continues:

In the case of some critics the seduction has been a total success. It has, for example, been asserted that the Regent in the tipped slouch hat, which hardly covers any of his long, lank hair, and whose curiously set eyes do not focus, was shown in a drunken state. [below]

This, he suggests, is a libel. He argues that it was a fashion at that time to wear hats on the side of the head. He cites medical opinion to prove that the Regent's expression could well be the result of a facial paralysis. He insists that the painting would have been unacceptable to the Regents if one of them had been portrayed drunk. One might go on discussing each of these points for pages. (Men in seventeenth-century Holland wore their hats on the side of their heads in order to be thought of as adventurous and pleasure-loving. Heavy drinking was an approved practice. Etcetera.) But such a discussion would take us even farther away from the only confrontation which matters and which the author is determined to evade.

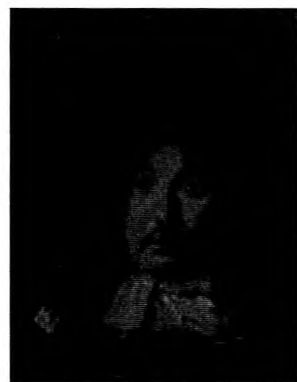
In this confrontation the Regents and Regentesses stare at Hals, a destitute old painter who has lost his reputation and lives off public charity; he examines them through the eyes of a pauper who must nevertheless try to be objective; i.e., must try to surmount the way he sees as a pauper. This is the drama of these paintings. A drama of an "unforgettable contrast."

Mystification has little to do with the vocabulary used. Mystification is the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident. Hals was the first portraitist to paint the new characters and expressions created by capitalism. He did in pictorial terms what Balzac did two centuries later in literature. Yet the author of the authoritative work on these paintings sums up the artist's achievement by referring to

Hals's unwavering commitment to his personal vision, which enriches our consciousness of our fellow men and heightens our awe for the ever-increasing power of the mighty impulses that enabled him to give us a close view of life's vital forces.

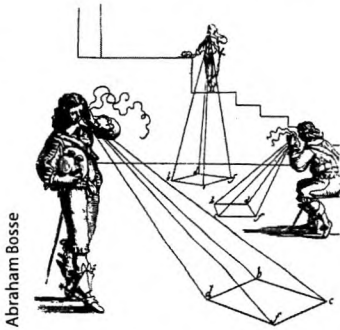
That is mystification.

In order to avoid mystifying the past (which can equally well suffer pseudo-Marxist mystification) let us now examine the particular relation



Regents of old men's almshouse of Haarlem, 1664, by Frans Hals (circa 1581-1666), oil on canvas, Hals, Frans (1582/3-1666)/Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, The Netherlands/De Agostini Picture Library/Bridgeman Images

which now exists, so far as pictorial images are concerned, between the present and the past. If we can see the present clearly enough, we shall ask the right questions of the past.



Abraham Bosse

Today we see the art of the past as nobody saw it before. We actually perceive it in a different way.

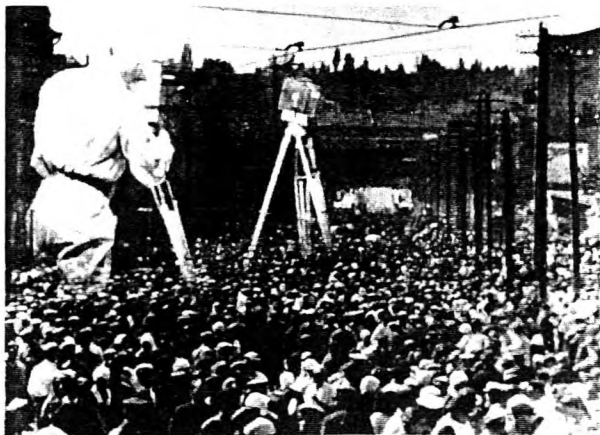
This difference can be illustrated in terms of what was thought of as perspective. The convention of perspective, which is unique to European art and which was first established in the early Renaissance, centers everything on the eye of the beholder. It is like a beam from a lighthouse — only instead of light traveling outwards, appearances travel in. The conventions called those appearances *reality*. Perspective makes the single eye the center of the visible world. Everything converges on to the

eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God.

According to the convention of perspective there is no visual reciprocity. There is no need for God to situate himself in relation to others: he is himself the situation. The inherent contradiction in perspective was that it structured all images of reality to address a single spectator who, unlike God, could only be in one place at a time.

After the invention of the camera this contradiction gradually became apparent.

I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I'm in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects. I creep under them. I move alongside a running horse's mouth. I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, maneuvering in the chaotic movements, recording one movement after another in the most complex combinations.



Still from *Man with a Movie Camera* by Vertov [1895–1954].

Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I coordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you.²

The camera isolated momentary appearances and in so doing destroyed the idea that images were timeless. Or, to put it another way, the camera showed that the notion of time passing was inseparable from the experience of the visual (except in paintings). What you saw depended upon where you were when. What you saw was relative to your position in time and space. It was no longer possible to imagine everything converging on the human eye as on the vanishing point of infinity.

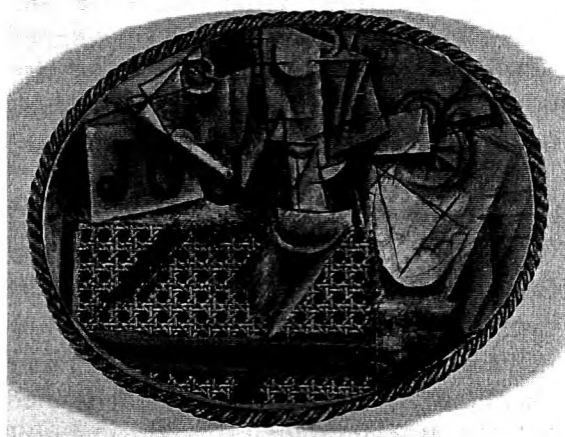
This is not to say that before the invention of the camera men believed that everyone could see everything. But perspective organized the visual field as though that were indeed the ideal. Every drawing or painting that used perspective proposed to the spectator that he was the unique center of the world. The camera — and more particularly the movie camera — demonstrated that there was no center.

The invention of the camera changed the way men saw. The visible came to mean something different to them. This was immediately reflected in painting.

THE INVENTION OF THE CAMERA CHANGED THE WAY MEN SAW.

For the Impressionists the visible no longer presented itself to man in order to be seen. On the contrary, the visible, in continual flux, became fugitive. For the Cubists the visible was no longer what confronted the single eye, but the totality of possible views taken from points all round the object (or person) being depicted [below].

The invention of the camera also changed the way in which men saw paintings painted long before the camera was invented. Originally paintings were an integral part of the building for which they were designed. Sometimes in an early Renaissance church or chapel one has the feeling that the images on the wall are records of the building's interior life, that



Pablo Picasso, "Still Life with a Wicker Chair" © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY/© 2016 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Still Life with Wicker Chair by Picasso [1881–1893].



Church of St. Francis at Assisi.

together they make up the building's memory — so much are they part of the particularity of the building [at left].

The uniqueness of every painting was once part of the uniqueness of the place where it resided. Sometimes the painting was transportable. But it could never be seen in two places at the same time. When the camera reproduces a painting, it destroys the uniqueness of its image. As a result its meaning changes. Or, more exactly, its meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings.

This is vividly illustrated by what happens when a painting is shown on a television screen. The painting enters each viewer's house. There it is surrounded by his wallpaper, his furniture, his mementos. It enters the atmosphere of his family. It becomes their talking point. It lends its meaning to their meaning. At

the same time it enters a million other houses and, in each of them, is seen in a different context. Because of the camera, the painting now travels to the spectator rather than the spectator to the painting. In its travels, its meaning is diversified.

One might argue that all reproductions more or less distort, and that therefore the original painting is still in a sense unique. Here [on the next page] is a reproduction of the *Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo da Vinci.

Having seen this reproduction, one can go to the National Gallery to look at the original and there discover what the reproduction lacks. Alternatively one can forget about the quality of the reproduction and simply be reminded, when one sees the original, that it is a famous painting of which somewhere one has already seen a reproduction. But in either case the uniqueness of the original now lies in it being *the original of a repro-*

duction. It is no longer what its image shows that strikes one as unique; its first meaning is no longer to be found in what it says, but in what it is.

This new status of the original work is the perfectly rational consequence of the new means of reproduction. But it is at this point that a process of mystification again enters. The meaning of the original work no longer lies in what it uniquely says but in what it uniquely is. How is its unique existence evaluated and defined in our present culture? It is defined as an object whose value depends



upon its rarity. This market is affirmed and gauged by the price it fetches on the market. But because it is nevertheless "a work of art" — and art is thought to be greater than commerce — its market price is said to be a reflection of its spiritual value. Yet the spiritual value of an object, as distinct from a message or an example, can only be explained in terms of magic or religion. And since in modern society neither of these is a living force, the art object, the "work of art," is enveloped in an atmosphere of entirely bogus religiosity. Works of art are discussed and presented as though they were holy relics: relics which are first and foremost evidence of their own survival. The past in which they originated is studied in order to prove their survival genuine. They are declared art when their line of descent can be certified.

Before the *Virgin of the Rocks* the visitor to the National Gallery would be encouraged by nearly everything he might have heard and read about the painting to feel something like this: "I am in front of it. I can see it. This painting by Leonardo is unlike any other in the world. The National Gallery has the real one. If I look at this painting hard enough, I should somehow be able to feel its authenticity. The *Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo da Vinci: it is authentic and therefore it is beautiful."

To dismiss such feelings as naive would be quite wrong. They accord perfectly with the sophisticated culture of art experts for whom the National Gallery catalogue is written. The entry on the *Virgin of the Rocks* is one of the longest entries. It consists of fourteen closely printed pages. They do not deal with the meaning of the image. They deal with who commissioned the painting, legal squabbles, who owned it, its likely date, the families of its owners. Behind this information lie years of research. The aim of the research is to prove beyond any shadow of doubt that the painting is a genuine Leonardo. The secondary aim is to prove that an almost identical painting in the Louvre is a replica of the National Gallery version.

French art historians try to prove the opposite.

The National Gallery sells more reproductions of Leonardo's cartoon of *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and St. John the Baptist* [on the next page] than any other picture in their collection. A few years ago it was known only to scholars. It became famous because an American wanted to buy it for two and a half million pounds.

Now it hangs in a room by itself. The room is like a chapel. The drawing is behind bullet-proof perspex. It has acquired a new kind of



Virgin of the Rocks by Leonardo da Vinci
[1452–1519].

© National Gallery, London/
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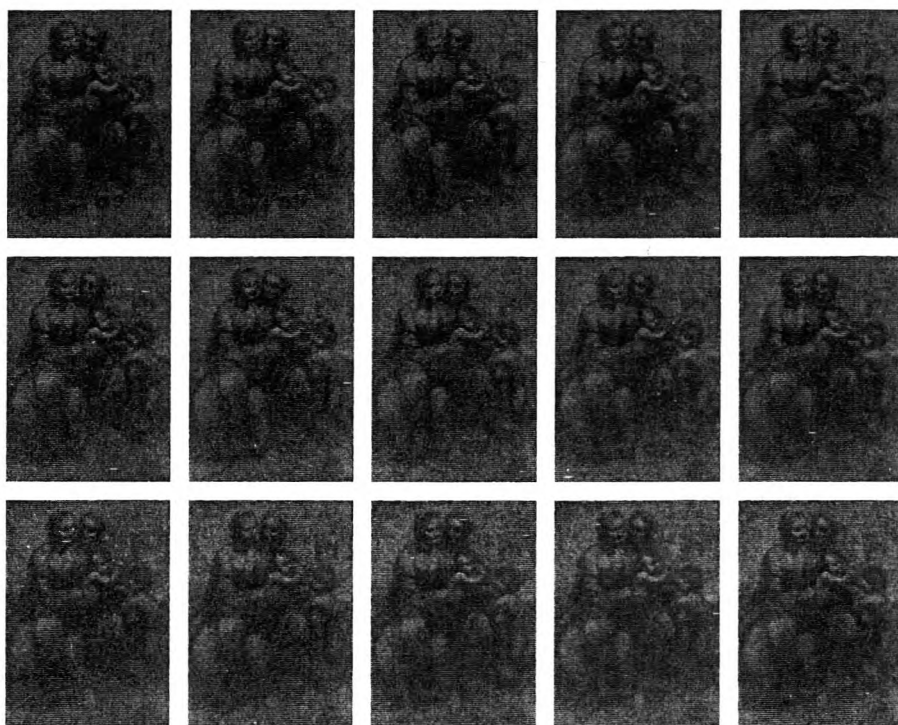
National
Gallery

Musée du Louvre, Paris, France, RMN-Grand Palais/
Art Resource, NY



Virgin of the Rocks by Leonardo da Vinci
[1452–1519]. Louvre Museum.

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The Virgin and Child with St. Anne and St. John the Baptist by Leonardo da Vinci
[1452–1519].

impressiveness. Not because of what it shows — not because of the meaning of its image. It has become impressive, mysterious, because of its market value.

The bogus religiosity which now surrounds original works of art, and which is ultimately dependent upon their market value, has become the substitute for what paintings lost when the camera made them reproducible. Its function is nostalgic. It is the final empty claim for the continuing values of an oligarchic, undemocratic culture. If the image is no longer unique and exclusive, the art object, the thing, must be made mysteriously so.

The majority of the population do not visit art museums. The following table shows how closely an interest in art is related to privileged education.

National proportion of art museum visitors according to level of education:
Percentage of each educational category who visit art museums

	Greece	Poland	France	Holland		Greece	Poland	France	Holland
With no educational qualification	0.02	0.12	0.15	—	Only secondary education	10.5	10.4	10	20
Only primary education	0.30	1.50	0.45	0.50	Further and higher education	11.5	11.7	12.5	17.3

Source: Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *L'Amour de l'art*, Editions de Minuit, Paris 1969, Appendix 5, table 4.

The majority take it as axiomatic that the museums are full of holy relics which refer to a mystery which excludes them: the mystery of unaccountable wealth. Or, to put this another way, they believe that original masterpieces belong to the preserve (both materially and spiritually) of the rich. Another table indicates what the idea of an art gallery suggests to each social class.

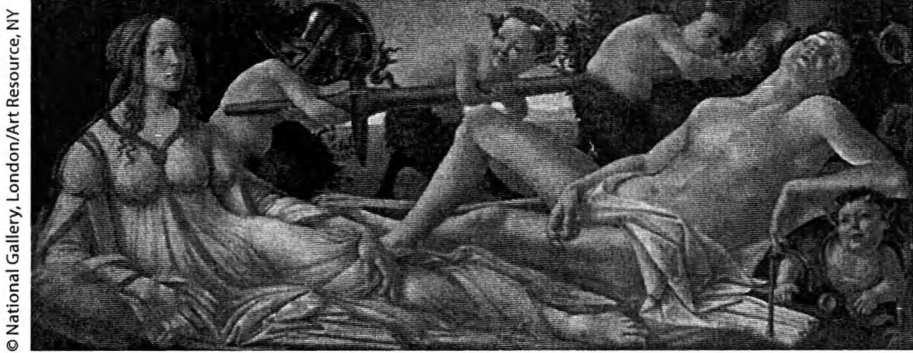
Of the places listed below which does a museum remind you of most?

	Manual workers	Skilled and white collar workers	Professional and upper managerial
	%	%	%
Church	66	45	30.5
Library	9	34	28
Lecture hall	—	4	4.5
Department store or entrance hall in public building	—	7	2
Church and library	9	2	4.5
Church and lecture hall	4	2	—
Library and lecture hall	—	—	2
None of these	4	2	19.5
No reply	8	4	9
	100 (n = 53)	100 (n = 98)	100 (n = 99)

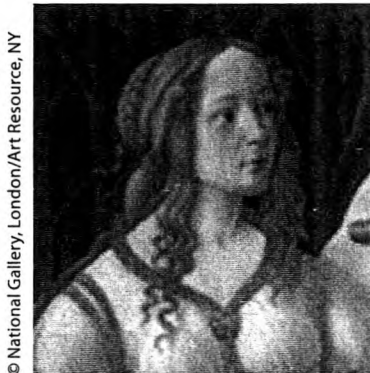
Source: as above, Appendix 4, table 8.

In the age of pictorial reproduction the meaning of paintings is no longer attached to them; their meaning becomes transmittable: that is to say it becomes information of a sort, and, like all information, it is either put to use or ignored; information carries no special authority within itself. When a painting is put to use, its meaning is either modified or totally changed. One should be quite clear about what this involves. It is not a question of reproduction failing to reproduce certain aspects of an image faithfully; it is a question of reproduction making it possible, even inevitable, that an image will be used for many different purposes and that the reproduced image, unlike an original work, can lend itself to them all. Let us examine some of the ways in which the reproduced image lends itself to such usage.

Reproduction isolates a detail of a painting from the whole. The detail is transformed. An allegorical figure becomes a portrait of a girl.



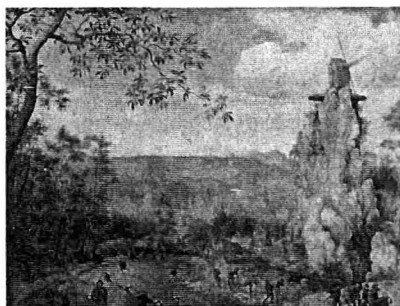
Venus and Mars by Botticelli [1445–1510].



© National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY

When a painting is reproduced by a film camera it inevitably becomes material for the film-maker's argument.

A film which reproduces images of a painting leads the spectator, through the painting, to the film-maker's own conclusions. The painting lends authority to the film-maker. This is because a film unfolds in time and a painting does not. In a film the way one image follows another, their succession, constructs an argument which becomes irreversible. In a painting all its elements are there to be seen simultaneously. The spectator may need time to examine each element of the painting but whenever he reaches a conclusion, the simultaneity of the whole painting is there to reverse or qualify his conclusion. The painting maintains its own authority [below]. Paintings are often reproduced with words around them.



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY



Procession to Calvary by Breughel [1525–1569].

This is a landscape of a cornfield with birds flying out of it. Look at it for a moment [below]. Then turn the page [see page 153].

It is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have. The image now illustrates the sentence.

In this essay each image reproduced has become part of an argument which has little or nothing to do with the painting's original independent meaning. The words have quoted the paintings to confirm their own verbal authority. . . .

Reproduced paintings, like all information, have to hold their own against all the other information being continually transmitted.

Consequently a reproduction, as well as making its own references to the image of its original, becomes itself the reference point for other images. The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees

Van Gogh Museum Foundation, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Art Resource, NY



Wheatfield with Crows by Van Gogh [1853–1890].



Van Gogh Museum Foundation, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Art Resource, NY

This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself.

immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it. Such authority as it retains, is distributed over the whole context in which it appears.

Because works of art are reproducible, they can, theoretically, be used by anybody. Yet mostly — in art books, magazines, films, or within gilt frames in living-rooms — reproductions are still used to bolster the illusion that nothing has changed, that art, with its unique undiminished authority, justifies most other forms of authority, that art makes inequality seem noble and hierarchies seem thrilling. For example, the whole concept of the National Cultural Heritage exploits the authority of art to glorify the present social system and its priorities.

The means of reproduction are used politically and commercially to disguise or deny what their existence makes possible. But sometimes individuals use them differently [see page 154].

Adults and children sometimes have boards in their bedrooms or living-rooms on which they pin pieces of paper: letters, snapshots, reproductions of paintings, newspaper cuttings, original drawings, postcards. On each board all the images belong to the same language and all are more or less equal within it, because they have been chosen in a highly personal way to match and express the experience of the room's inhabitant. Logically, these boards should replace museums.

What are we saying by that? Let us first be sure about what we are not saying.

We are not saying that there is nothing left to experience before original works of art except a sense of awe because they have survived. The way original works of art are usually approached — through museum catalogues, guides, hired cassettes, etc. — is not the only way they might be approached. When the art of the past ceases to be viewed nostalgically, the works will cease to be holy relics — although they will never re-become what they were before the age of reproduction. We are not saying original works of art are now useless.



**ORIGINAL PAINTINGS
ARE SILENT AND STILL IN A SENSE
THAT INFORMATION NEVER IS.**

Original paintings are silent and still in a sense that information never is. Even a reproduction hung on a wall is not comparable in this respect for in the original the silence and stillness permeate the actual material, the paint, in which one follows the traces of the painter's immediate gestures. This has the effect of closing the distance in time between the painting of the picture and one's own act of looking at it. In this special sense all paintings are contemporary. Hence the immediacy of their testimony. Their historical moment is literally there before our eyes. Cézanne made a similar observation from the painter's point of view. "A minute in the world's life passes! To paint it in its reality, and forget everything for that! To become that minute, to be the sensitive plate . . . give the image of what we see, forgetting everything that has appeared before our time. . . ." What we make of that painted moment when it is before our eyes depends upon what we expect of art, and that in turn depends today upon how we have already experienced the meaning of paintings through reproductions.

Nor are we saying that all art can be understood spontaneously. We are not claiming that to cut out a magazine reproduction of an archaic Greek head, because it is reminiscent of some personal experience, and to pin it to a board beside other disparate images, is to come to terms with the full meaning of that head.

The idea of innocence faces two ways. By refusing to enter a conspiracy, one remains innocent of that conspiracy. But to remain innocent may also be to remain ignorant. The issue is not between innocence and knowledge (or between the natural and the cultural) but between a total approach to art which attempts to relate it to every aspect of experience and the

esoteric approach of a few specialized experts who are the clerks of the nostalgia of a ruling class in decline. (In decline, not before the proletariat, but before the new power of the corporation and the state.) The real question is: to whom does the meaning of the art of the past properly belong? to those who can apply it to their own lives, or to a cultural hierarchy of relic specialists?

The visual arts have always existed within a certain preserve; originally this preserve was magical or sacred. But it was also physical: it was the place, the cave, the building, in which, or for which, the work was made. The experience of art, which at first was the experience of ritual, was set apart from the rest of life — precisely in order to be able to exercise power over it. Later the preserve of art became a social one. It entered the culture of the ruling class, while physically it was set apart and isolated in their palaces and houses. During all this history the authority of art was inseparable from the particular authority of the preserve.

What the modern means of reproduction have done is to destroy the authority of art and to remove it — or, rather, to remove its images which they reproduce — from any preserve. For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free. They surround us in the same way as a language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life over which they no longer, in themselves, have power.



Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Woman Pouring Milk by Vermeer [1632–1675].

Yet very few people are aware of what has happened because the means of reproduction are used nearly all the time to promote the illusion that nothing has changed except that the masses, thanks to reproductions, can now begin to appreciate art as the cultured minority once did. Understandably, the masses remain uninterested and skeptical.

If the new language of images were used differently, it would, through its use, confer a new kind of power. Within it we could begin to define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate. (Seeing comes before words.) Not only personal experience, but also the essential historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become the active agents.

The art of the past no longer exists as it once did. Its authority is lost. In its place there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for what purpose. This touches upon questions of copyright for reproduction, the ownership of art presses and publishers, the total policy of public art galleries and museums. As usually presented, these are narrow professional matters. One of the aims of this essay has been to show that what is really at stake is much larger. A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to situate itself in history. This is why — and this is the only reason why — the entire art of the past has now become a political issue.



J. L.L. Banús/AGE Fotostock

Walter Benjamin

Many of the ideas in the preceding essay have been taken from another, written over forty years ago by the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin.

His essay was entitled The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. This essay is available in English in a collection called Illuminations (Cape, London, 1970).

NOTES

¹ Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals* (Phaidon, London). [All notes are Berger's.]

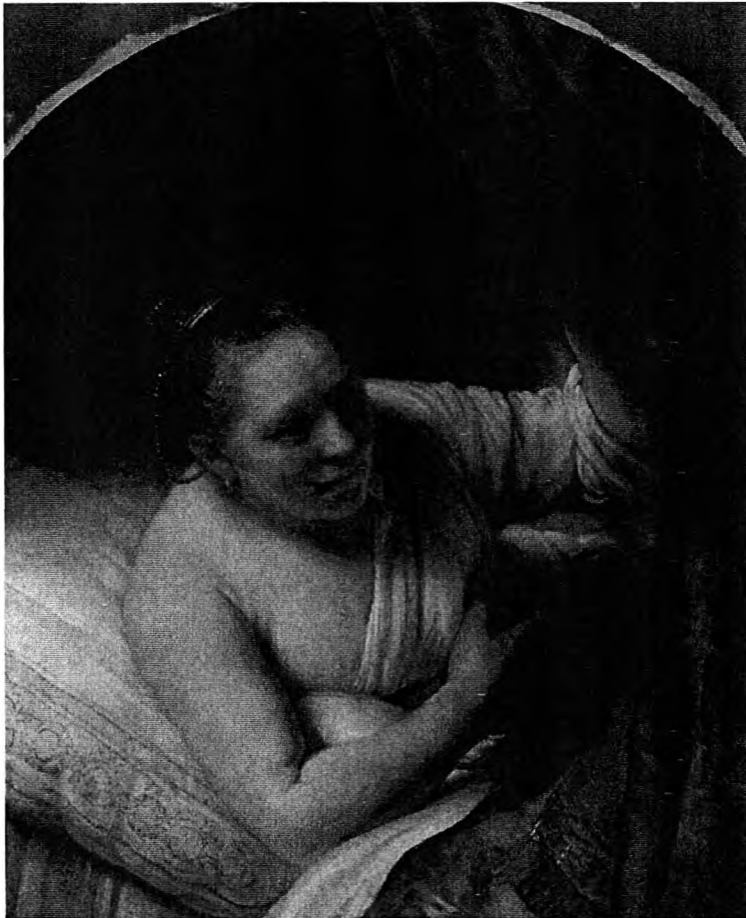
² This quotation is from an article written in 1923 by Dziga Vertov, the revolutionary Soviet film director.

We were unable to reproduce all of the images from the original text of "Ways of Seeing." If you would like to track them down, you might look for a copy of Berger's book *Ways of Seeing* in your college or university library. You'll find them there. — Eds.

.....

On Rembrandt's *Woman in Bed*

It is strange how art historians sometimes pay so much attention, when trying to date certain paintings, to "style," inventories, bills, auction lists, and so little to the painted evidence concerning the model's age. It is as if they do not trust the painter on this point. For example, when they try to date and arrange in chronological order Rembrandt's paintings of Hendrickje Stoffels. No painter was a greater expert about the process of aging, and no painter has left us a more intimate record of the great love of his life. Whatever the documentary conjectures may allow, the paintings make it clear that the love between Hendrickje and the painter lasted for about twenty years, until her death, six years before his.



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Woman in Bed by Rembrandt.

She was ten or twelve years younger than he. When she died she was, on the evidence of the paintings, at the very least forty-five, and when he first painted her she could certainly not have been older than twenty-seven. Their daughter, Cornelia, was baptized in 1654. This means that Hendrickje gave birth to their child when she was in her mid-thirties.

The *Woman in Bed* (from Edinburgh) was painted, by my reckoning, a little before or a little after the birth of Cornelia. The historians suggest that it may be a fragment taken from a larger work representing the wedding night of Sarah and Tobias. A biblical subject for Rembrandt was always contemporary. If it is a fragment, it is certain that Rembrandt finished it, and bequeathed it finally to the spectator, as his most intimate painting of the woman he loved.

There are other paintings of Hendrickje. Before the *Bathsheba* in the Louvre, or the *Woman Bathing* in the National Gallery (London), I am wordless. Not because their genius inhibits me, but because the experience from which they derive and which they express — desire experiencing itself as something as old as the known world, tenderness experiencing itself as the end of the world, the eyes' endless rediscovery, as if for the first time, of their love of a familiar body — all this comes before and goes beyond words. No other paintings lead so deftly and powerfully to silence. Yet, in both, Hendrickje is absorbed in her own actions. In the painter's vision of her there is the greatest intimacy, but there is no mutual intimacy between them. They are paintings which speak of his love, not of hers.

In the painting of the *Woman in Bed* there is a complicity between the woman and the painter. This complicity includes both reticence and abandon, day and night. The curtain of the bed, which Hendrickje lifts up with her hand, marks the threshold between daytime and nighttime.

In two years, by daylight, Van Rijn will be declared bankrupt. Ten years before, by daylight, Hendrickje came to work in Van Rijn's house as a nurse for his baby son. In the light of Dutch seventeenth-century accountability and Calvinism, the housekeeper and the painter have distinct and separate responsibilities. Hence their reticence.

At night, they leave their century.

A necklace hangs loose across her breasts,
And between them lingers —
yet is it a lingering
and not an incessant arrival? —
the perfume of forever.
A perfume as old as sleep,
as familiar to the living as to the dead.

Leaning forward from her pillows, she lifts up the curtain with the back of her hand, for its palm, its face, is already welcoming, already making a gesture which is preparatory to the act of touching his head.

She has not yet slept. Her gaze follows him as he approaches. In her face the two of them are reunited. Impossible now to separate the two images: his image of her in bed, as he remembers her: her image of him as she sees him approaching their bed. It is nighttime.

.....

On Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew*

One night in bed you asked me who was my favorite painter. I hesitated, searching for the least knowing, most truthful answer. Caravaggio. My own reply surprised me. There are nobler painters and painters of greater breadth of vision. There are painters I admire more and who are more admirable. But there is none, so it seems — for the answer came unpremeditated — to whom I feel closer.

The few canvases from my own incomparably modest life as a painter, which I would like to see again, are those I painted in the late 1940s of the streets of Livorno. This city was then war-scarred and poor, and it was there that I first began to learn something about the ingenuity of the dispossessed. It was there too that I discovered that I wanted as little as possible to do in this world with those who wield power. This has turned out to be a lifelong aversion.



Scala/Art Resource, NY

The Calling of St. Matthew by Caravaggio.

The complicity I feel with Caravaggio began, I think, during that time in Livorno. He was the first painter of life as experienced by the popolaccio, the people of the backstreets, les sans-culottes, the lumpenproletariat, the lower orders, those of the lower depths, the underworld. There is no word in any traditional European language which does not either denigrate or patronize the urban poor it is naming. That is power.

Following Caravaggio up to the present day, other painters — Brower, Ostade, Hogarth, Goya, Géricault, Guttuso — have painted pictures of the same social milieu. But all of them — however great — were genre pictures, painted in order to show others how the less fortunate or the more dangerous lived. With Caravaggio, however, it was not a question of presenting scenes but of seeing itself. He does not depict the underworld for others: his vision is one that he shares with it.

In art-historical books Caravaggio is listed as one of the great innovating masters of chiaroscuro and a forerunner of the light and shade later used by Rembrandt and others. His vision can of course be considered art-historically as a step in the evolution of European art. Within such a perspective a Caravaggio was almost inevitable, as a link between the high art of the Counter Reformation and the domestic art of the emerging Dutch bourgeoisie, the form of this link being that of a new kind of space, defined by darkness as well as by light. (For Rome and for Amsterdam damnation had become an everyday affair.)

**IN ART-HISTORICAL BOOKS
CARAVAGGIO IS LISTED AS ONE OF
THE GREAT INNOVATING MASTERS
OF CHIAROSCURO.**

For the Caravaggio who actually existed — for the boy called Michelangelo born in a village near Bergamo, not far from where my friends, the Italian woodcutters, come — light and shade, as he imagined and saw them, had a deeply personal meaning, inextricably entwined with his desires and his instinct for survival. And it

is by this, not by any art-historical logic, that his art is linked with the underworld.

His chiaroscuro allowed him to banish daylight. Shadows, he felt, offered shelter as can four walls and a roof. Whatever and wherever he painted he really painted interiors. Sometimes — for *The Flight into Egypt* or one of his beloved John the Baptists — he was obliged to include a landscape in the background. But these landscapes are like rugs or drapes hung up on a line across an inner courtyard. He only felt at home — no, that he felt nowhere — he only felt relatively at ease *inside*.

His darkness smells of candles, overripe melons, damp washing waiting to be hung out the next day: it is the darkness of stairwells, gambling corners, cheap lodgings, sudden encounters. And the promise is not in what will flare against it, but in the darkness itself. The shelter it offers is only relative, for the chiaroscuro reveals violence, suffering, longing, mortality, but at least it reveals them intimately. What has been banished, along with the daylight, are distance and solitude — and both these are feared by the underworld.

Those who live precariously and are habitually crowded together develop a phobia about open spaces which transforms their frustrating lack of space and privacy into something reassuring. He shared those fears.

The Calling of St. Matthew depicts five men sitting round their usual table, telling stories, gossiping, boasting of what one day they will do, counting money. The room is dimly lit. Suddenly the door is flung open. The two figures who enter are still part of the violent noise and light of the invasion. (Berenson wrote that Christ, who is one of the figures, comes in like a police inspector to make an arrest.)

Two of Matthew's colleagues refuse to look up, the other two younger ones stare at the strangers with a mixture of curiosity and condescension. Why is he proposing something so mad? Who's protecting him, the thin one who does all the talking? And Matthew, the tax-collector with a shifty conscience which has made him more unreasonable than most of his colleagues, points at himself and asks: Is it really I who must go? Is it really I who must follow you?

How many thousands of decisions to leave have resembled Christ's hand here! The hand is held out towards the one who has to decide, yet it is ungraspable because so fluid. It orders the way, yet offers no direct support. Matthew will get up and follow the thin stranger from the room, down the narrow streets, out of the district. He will write his gospel, he will travel to Ethiopia and the South Caspian and Persia. Probably he will be murdered.

And behind the drama of this moment of decision in the room at the top of the stairs, there is a window, giving onto the outside world. Traditionally in painting, windows were treated either as sources of light or as frames framing nature or framing an exemplary event outside. Not so this window. No light enters by it. The window is opaque. We see nothing. Mercifully we see nothing because what is outside is bound to be threatening. It is a window through which only the worst news can come.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Berger says, "The past is never there waiting to be discovered, to be recognized for exactly what it is. History always constitutes the relation between a present and its past" (p. 141). And he says, "If we 'saw' the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history. When we are prevented from seeing it, we are being deprived of the history which belongs to us" (p. 141). As you reread this essay, pay particular attention to Berger's uses of the word *history*. What does it stand for? What does it have to do with looking at pictures? How might you define the term if your definition were based on its use in this essay?

You might take Berger's discussion of the Hals paintings as a case in point. What is the relation Berger establishes between the past and the present? If he has not "discovered" the past or recognized it for exactly what it is, what has Berger done in writing about these paintings? What might it

mean to say that he has “situated” us in history or has returned a history that belongs to us? And in what way might this be said to be a political act?

2. Berger argues forcefully that the account of the Hals painting offered by the unnamed art historian is a case of “mystification.” How would you characterize Berger’s account of that same painting? Would you say that he sees what is “really” there? If so, why wasn’t it self-evident? Why does it take an expert to see “clearly”? As you read back over the essay, look for passages you could use to characterize the way Berger looks at images or paintings. If, as he says, “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe,” what does he know and what does he believe?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. We are not saying that there is nothing left to experience before original works of art except a sense of awe because they have survived. The way original works of art are usually approached — through museum catalogues, guides, hired cassettes, etc. — is not the only way they might be approached. When the art of the past ceases to be viewed nostalgically, the works will cease to be holy relics — although they will never re-become what they were before the age of reproduction. We are not saying original works of art are now useless. (p. 153)

Berger argues that there are barriers to vision, problems in the ways we see or don’t see original works of art, problems that can be located in and overcome by strategies of approach.

For Berger, what we lose if we fail to see properly is history: “If we ‘saw’ the art of the past, we would situate ourselves in history. When we are prevented from seeing it, we are being deprived of the history which belongs to us” (p. 141). It is not hard to figure out who, according to Berger, prevents us from seeing the art of the past. He says it is the ruling class. It is difficult, however, to figure out what he believes gets in the way and what all this has to do with history.

For this assignment, write an essay explaining what, as you read Berger, it is that gets in the way when we look at paintings, and what it is that we might do to overcome the barriers to vision (and to history). You should imagine that you are writing for someone who is interested in art, and is perhaps preparing to go to a museum, but has not read Berger’s essay. You will, that is, need to be careful in summary and paraphrase.

2. Berger says that the real question is this: “To whom does the meaning of the art of the past properly belong?” Let’s say, in Berger’s spirit, that it belongs to you. Look again at the painting by Vermeer, *Woman Pouring Milk*, that is included in “Ways of Seeing” (p. 155). Berger includes the painting but

without much discussion, as though he were, in fact, leaving it for you. Write an essay that shows others how they might best understand that painting. You should offer this lesson in the spirit of John Berger. Imagine that you are doing this work for him, perhaps as his apprentice.

3. Original paintings are silent and still in a sense that information never is. Even a reproduction hung on a wall is not comparable in this respect for in the original the silence and stillness permeate the actual material, the paint, in which one follows the traces of the painter's immediate gestures. This has the effect of closing the distance in time between the painting of the picture and one's own act of looking at it. . . . What we make of that painted moment when it is before our eyes depends upon what we expect of art, and that in turn depends today upon how we have already experienced the meaning of paintings through reproductions. (p. 154)

While Berger describes original paintings as silent in this passage, it is clear that these paintings begin to speak if one approaches them properly, if one learns to ask "the right questions of the past." Berger demonstrates one route of approach, for example, in his reading of the Hals paintings, where he asks questions about the people and objects and their relationships to the painter and the viewer. What the paintings might be made to say, however, depends on the viewer's expectations, his sense of the questions that seem appropriate or possible. Berger argues that, because of the way art is currently displayed, discussed, and reproduced, the viewer expects only to be mystified.

For this paper, imagine that you are working against the silence and mystification Berger describes. Go to a museum — or, if that is not possible, to a large-format book of reproductions in the library (or, if that is not possible, to the reproductions on the web) — and select a painting that seems silent and still, yet invites conversation. Your job is to figure out what sorts of questions to ask, to interrogate the painting, to get it to speak, to engage with the past in some form of dialogue. Write an essay in which you record this process and what you have learned from it. Somewhere in your paper, perhaps at the end, turn back to Berger's essay and speak to it about how this process has or hasn't confirmed what you take to be Berger's expectations.

Note: If possible, include with your essay a reproduction of the painting you select. (Check the postcards at the museum gift shop.) In any event, you want to make sure that you describe the painting in sufficient detail for your readers to follow what you say.

4. In "Ways of Seeing," Berger says,

If the new language of images were used differently, it would, through its use, confer a new kind of power. Within it we could begin to define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate. . . . Not only personal experience, but also the essential

historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become the active agents. (p. 156)

As a writer, Berger is someone who uses images (including some of the great paintings of the Western tradition) "to define [experience] more precisely in areas where words are inadequate." In *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, a wonderful book that is both a meditation on time and space and a long love letter, Berger writes about paintings in order to say what he wants to say to his lover. We have included two examples, descriptions of Rembrandt's *Woman in Bed* and Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew*.

Read these as examples, as lessons in how and why to look at, to value, to think with, to write about paintings. Then use one or both as a way of thinking about the concluding section of "Ways of Seeing." You can assume that your readers have read Berger's essay but have difficulty grasping what he is saying in that final section, particularly since it is a section that seems to call for action, asking the reader to do something. Of what use might Berger's examples be in trying to understand what we might do with and because of paintings?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Walker Percy in "The Loss of the Creature" (p. 436), like John Berger in "Ways of Seeing," talks about the problems people have seeing things. "How can the sightseer recover the Grand Canyon?" Percy asks. "He can recover it in any number of ways, all sharing in common the stratagem of avoiding the approved confrontation of the tour and the Park Service" (p. 437). There is a way in which Berger also tells a story about tourists — tourists going to a museum to see paintings, to buy postcards, gallery guides, reprints, and T-shirts featuring the image of the Mona Lisa. "The way original works of art are usually approached — through museum catalogues, guides, hired cassettes, etc. — is not the only way they might be approached. When the art of the past ceases to be viewed nostalgically, the works will cease to be holy relics — although they will never re-become what they were before the age of reproduction" (p. 153).

Write an essay in which you describe possible "approaches" to a painting in a museum, approaches that could provide for a better understanding or a more complete "recovery" of that painting than would be possible to a casual viewer, to someone who just wandered in, for example, with no strategy in mind. You should think of your essay as providing real advice to a real person. (You might, if you can, work with a particular painting in a particular museum.) What should that person do? How should that person prepare? What would the consequences be?

At least one of your approaches should reflect Percy's best advice to a viewer who wanted to develop a successful strategy, and at least one should represent the best you feel Berger would have to offer. When

you've finished explaining these approaches, go on in your essay to examine the differences between those you associate with Percy and those you associate with Berger. What are the key differences? And what do they say about the different ways these two thinkers approach the problem of why we do or do not see that which lies before us?

2. Both John Berger in "Ways of Seeing" and Michel Foucault in "Panopticism" (p. 291) discuss what Foucault calls "power relations." Berger claims that "the entire art of the past has now become a political issue," and he makes a case for the evolution of a "new language of images" that could "confer a new kind of power" if people were to understand history in art. Foucault argues that the Panopticon signals an "inspired" change in power relations. "It is," he says, "an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p. 297).

Both Berger and Foucault create arguments about power and its methods and goals. As you read through their essays, mark passages you might use to explain how each author thinks about power — where it comes from, who has it, how it works, where you look for it, how you know it when you see it, what it does, where it goes. You should reread the essays as a pair, as part of a single project in which you are seeking to explain theories of power.

Write an essay in which you present and explain "Ways of Seeing" and "Panopticism" as examples of Berger's and Foucault's theories of power and vision. Both Berger and Foucault are arguing against usual understandings of power and knowledge and history. In this sense, their projects are similar. Of course, there may be notable and interesting differences in their projects as well, and these might also be worth exploring.



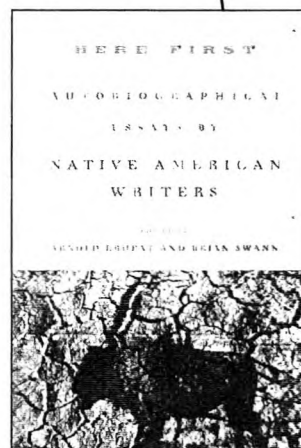
GLORIA Bird

Gloria Bird was born in 1951 in Washington State. She attended Portland Community College and in 1990 received her BA in English from Lewis & Clark College, both in Portland, Oregon. She received her MA in English in 1992 from the University of Arizona in Tucson. She taught literature and creative writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts for five years and currently teaches at the Wellpinit, Washington, campus of Salish Kootenai College. Bird has been a recipient of the Oregon Institute of Literary Arts' Oregon Writer's Grant (1988) and the Witter Bynner Foundation grant (1993). She is also a founding member of the Northwest Native American Writers Association and an associate editor for the *Wicazo Sa Review* and was a contributing editor for *Indian Artist Magazine*.

Bird is a member of the Spokane tribe of Washington State and works for the Spokane tribe of Indians in Wellpinit, Washington, in addition to teaching and writing. Her poetry and criticism focus on Native American identity and colonialism. She has published two books of her own poetry: *Full Moon on the Reservation* (1993), for which she won the Diane Decorah Memorial Award, and *The River of History* (1997). Along with Joy Harjo, Bird edited the anthology *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writing of North America* (1997). Bird also coauthored *A Filmography for Native American Education* (1973) with Carroll Warner Williams. She is currently working on a large ongoing project started in 1988: a poetry collection focusing on the Nez Perce retreat of 1877.

In the following essay from the anthology *Here First: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers* (2000), Bird grapples with the "misrepresentations of 'Indian' that are legitimized in academia and pop culture about Native peoples" and her own scholarly orientation and methods. She cites African American feminist literature as an influence that led her to study the internalization of colonial attitudes by colonized peoples. A passion and drive for seeking justice permeates her work. In "Breaking the Silence: Writing as 'Witness,'" published in *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing* in 1998 by the University of Arizona Press, Bird expounds upon the ethical imperative inherent in the kind of work she does. She explains that

stories and memoirs provide strength to marginalized peoples through the processes of witnessing and testimony. These processes, she writes, are "viable tools that serve the purposes of decolonization by providing details of individual processing of the complexities of inheritance that living in the aftermath of colonization provides" (*Speaking for the Generations*, p. 29).



.....

Autobiography as Spectacle: An Act of Liberation or the Illusion of Liberation?

Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses. No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production.

My turn to state an equation: colonization = "thingification . . ."

I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about "achievements," diseases cured, improved standards of living. I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out. . . . I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life — from life, from the dance, from wisdom.

— AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, *Discourse on Colonialism* (21–22)

I begin with Césaire as a springboard into my discussion of being Native in America because it is good for perspective. (Who knows the tactics of colonialism better than the colonized?) Also, as a Native writer I am intimately involved in evaluating the aftermath of colonization and its impact that cannot help but shape my life and my own perceptions of the world. The competing stories of the indigenous peoples' sense of tribal histories and the privileged, legitimized

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perspectives on national history are on a collision course. It is from this place that I write, digesting, and ultimately attempt to undo the damage that colonization has wrought. From the Third World, the war dance in the blood has been reawakened.

Placing my story on public display is not something I have undertaken lightly. I enter this discourse hesitantly, knowing that my story, my life, my words are all a part of a spectacle, a peering into Indian life and

thought that is in a sense intrusive. I have agreed because of the opportunity this offers to counter some of the misrepresentations of "Indian" that are legitimized in academia and pop culture about Native peoples. To this end, I would like to place my story against the backdrop of colonial context to address some of the misperceptions about Native people that compose the construct of "Indian" in the mainstream. I understand that the Native Other when viewed up close should pose no threat in a system where all transferable signs mirror the image of *all that I am not*. And so I begin with the paradox of constructing an idea of "self" in terms that presuppose a colonial mental bondage.

How I have come to know myself as Indian is contradicted continually in mainstream pop culture, in commercials, in ads in magazines, and in film. I recognize that outside of my immediate Native community, images of Indians are not held up as either the ideal or a template for "beauty." From my perspective, then, I am continually forced to negotiate between *what I know* and what I am told about myself as an Indian. Neither do I believe that my dilemma in this case or my particular experience is unique to me. As an example, I recall a day when my oldest daughter, who was four years old, came home crying. She had been next door playing with a neighbor's child. They had been watching an old black-and-white western on TV. The neighbor boy pointed to the screen laughing at the hooting Indians being chased by cavalry and told her that she was an "Indian." I hugged my heartbroken daughter and said, "But you *are* an Indian." She told me right back, "But I'm not *that* kind of Indian." None of us are.

I attended one year at public school (one out of two years spent outside of the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA] Indian boarding school system). In the Washington State history text, the history of Northwest Native peoples was given in one full paragraph that highlighted Chief Sealth, for whom the city of Seattle was named. Not only did it appear that we Natives of Washington State did not exist, but we also had not apparently made a contribution worth mentioning.

Having lived on reservations during the early part of my life, the areas of Native history and shared cultural knowledge were often assisted by *place*. With our grandparents, we, my younger sister and I, traveled to the reservation to picnic, to sit under the trees on blankets and listen to our grandparents talking. We often found ourselves above Tshimakain Creek, where the land sloped down into a brush-filled ravine surrounded by pine trees, a favorite spot of my grandfather. On the rise above where we sat to eat stood a pine tree that formed a huge Y. In the center of its branches, where the two arms met the trunk of the tree, a cradleboard lay on its side, the tree growing up and around it. It looked as though a great hand had forced the cradleboard straight down into the heart of the tree, the headrest jutting from one side and the footrest from the other.

The story is a simple one: *The people were running from cavalry, and a young mother placed her baby in the cradleboard in the Y of the tree to save it, running, leading the cavalry in another direction from her child. She never returned.*

Later, the story of Colonel Steptoe, defeated at the butte named for his humiliation, unfolds. In retaliation, the army killed the Indians' horses, approximately seven hundred animals belonging to the Spokanes. Though these two events may not be directly connected they are to my mind a reminder of our history, filled with violence and oppression. The Spokane were considered "hostile" as were all tribal groups who refused to sign treaties, an act of resistance that would inevitably lead to reduced land-holdings and confine them to a reservation.

My grandparents would have been too young to have lived through those times. But maybe my great-grandmother, my *tu pi ya*? While we sat contemplating fried chicken and potato salad, swatting the ants from the blanket, my mind rushed forward to the conclusion of the story of the baby tied into the cradleboard, who cried into the night, rocking in the arms of the sleepless tree.

Once, on returning home, I went in search of this picnic spot, driving in circles and following dead-end dirt roads to rediscover the place rooted in my memories as cradling tribal and family history. The site was not to be found. I was told later that some young men out on a drinking/shooting spree had shot the cradleboard into nothing. How well we Indians have learned from the colonizer to devalue our history.

Take, for instance, then President Ronald Reagan speaking in Moscow in 1988:

Let me tell you just a little something about the American Indian in our land. We have provided millions of acres of land for what are called "preservations" — or, "reservations," I should say. They, from the beginning, announced that they wanted to maintain their way of life as they had always lived, there on the plains and the desert, and so forth. And we set up these reservations so they could. And we have a Bureau of Indian Affairs to help take care of them. At the same time, we provide education for them — schools on the reservations. And they are free also to leave the reservations and be American citizens among the rest of us — and many do. Some still prefer, however, that early way of life. And we have done everything we can to meet their demands as to what and how they want to live. Maybe we made a mistake; maybe we should not have humored them in that wanting to stay in that primitive lifestyle. Maybe we should have said, no, come join us, be citizens.¹

That the then president of the United States could be as publicly oblivious to Native peoples to the extent that our citizenship was in question, and that our livelihood was perceived as "primitive"; to deny the United States' obligation to uphold Indian treaties; to offhandedly refer to Indian reservations as "preservations"; to suggest that it was a "mistake" to set aside these lands (conveniently forgetting that this was done in exchange for Indians' ceding larger tracts of land); to suggest that this was a pacification move on the part of the United States, "to humor them," meaning us, is an outrage. I view Reagan's ignorance of Indian history, and consequently American history, as a mirror of America's basic lack of knowledge about us.

Only last year, my thirteen-year-old son came home from school with homework in social studies in which one of his questions required his

answering that *wampum belts = money*. Commodification of Native systems of documenting agreements is a gross misinterpretation. Though it is not surprising that the historical significance of tribal agreements are mediated through Euro-American standards based upon exchange value.

The commodification of "Indian" has also reached the dialogue of Native peoples themselves, exemplifying, at least to this writer, the extent of the colonization. That my tribal ID has currency value and that tribes are now in the business of selling memberships clouds further the issue of legitimate claim. There is an irony to the *buying into* the effects of colonization, such as oppression, dispossession, the inherited guilt and shame many of us have been made to associate with our being Indian. The commodity gain, the immediate profit, is an assumed access to Native spiritual and cultural knowledge, which I read as the paraphernalia of romanticism of Native peoples. This phenomenon *does* have an exchange value in a corrupt system.

THE DIFFICULTY OF COMMUNICATING IS NOT SO MUCH A QUESTION OF SPEAKING ACROSS CULTURES SO MUCH AS IT IS A PROBLEM OF SPEAKING ACROSS REALITIES THAT ARE CULTURE BOUND.

I understand that the way I have come to know myself as Indian has been a process of socialization which includes a way of perceiving the world that is unique to the people from whom I am descended. This apprehension of the world is culture bound and serves as an axiom of how my perception differs from *the Other's* perception or *reality* of the world. As I see it, the difficulty of communicating is not so much a question of speaking across cultures so much as it is a problem of speaking across realities that are culture bound. It's always easier to move through the world oblivious. By that I mean that it is easier to rely solely on what can be seen, touched, and proven. The extreme of that seems to be manipulating those who live obliviously by becoming an Indian-on-call, where one can always claim to have had a vision or a shamanic ancestor, for example. It appears that the quickest way to "Indianness" is the path of least resistance.

For Native peoples reared in Native communities, it is easy to spot the impostors, whose claim to "Indianness" as a solid, unbending reality reeks of self-centeredness and currency. Neither does a brown face automatically assure "Indianness," only a shared marginalization. I hear the storm, and in that the outcry at "essentialism." Still, I believe it is easier on the reservation to talk about *being* Indian. As my mother says, "If you have to claim to be a medicine man, then you aren't."

There is a comic scene, for instance, in the movie *Thunderheart* where the tribal policeman (Graham Greene) informs the FBI agent (Val Kilmer) that he, Kilmer, has had a *vision*. Incredulous, Greene tells Kilmer how he's lived on the reservation all his life and has never had a vision. This seemingly harmless, near throwaway scene points to one of the conflicting representations of "Indian," and exemplifies the contradictions at work in mainstream consciousness about "Indianness." Which is that anything Indian is public domain property and that sacredness is not

respected or is applied superficially and arbitrarily to everything. But, hey, we're supposed to be entertained.

The basic premise for the movie relies upon our buying into the idea that a young man of Indian descent who has been reared far from his origins — and who has learned early to be ashamed of his Indian father — begins having visions. The plot is to take, for all practical purposes, this white guy, a descendant of Indian heritage, place him on an Indian reservation where he begins *seeing* things, namely, the massacre of Wounded Knee, his people being chased by cavalry and shot down, and remnants of the people dancing the Ghost Dance. We witness his transformation from anti-Indian white who disclaims the people who live in Third World conditions in the middle of the United States ("These are not my people") in the beginning, to pro-Indian red in the end, befriending along the way the tribal policeman and a medicine man — who tells him that "Mr. Magoo is not to be trusted."

The backdrop to the plot are the issues surrounding American Indian Movement (AIM, aka ARM in the movie) activity on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and the death of Anna Mae Aquash, though all of the details surrounding these issues have been fictionalized. But perhaps the saving grace of this movie is that the FBI are not the good guys — and, in fact, are the criminals. The uncomfortable truth of this film, if there is one to be found, is the representation of Indians oppressing other Indians. The usefulness of this last configuration should not be underestimated nor the impact upon Native communities overlooked. I will return to this idea later, but I would like to digress to comment upon why I find the critique of Native representation useful.

I began writing as a poet, but received my degree in literature. Along the way, I have been influenced by the personal narrative writing styles of African American feminist writers, and began writing criticism that attempted to *read* Native American literatures as a product of colonization, looking at ways that Native peoples have internalized colonial attitudes and beliefs about themselves that appear in their creative work. Early on, I questioned the usefulness of this type of criticism and wondered whether or not it was self-defeating to criticize other Native writers. That process could be thought of as playing into the hands of the colonizer. I am still struggling with the moral dilemma this poses for me; aggressive criticism goes against the way I have been raised. I suspect this has a bearing on why there are few Native writers who write literary criticism.

My alternative was to practice what I preached in my own creative endeavors. I began writing prose poems in which I incorporate criticism of Native representation — knowing full well that there would be critics of both the form and content. It is not my intention here to argue poetic strategies. If anyone has the need to engage in that discussion, they may.

The issues of representation overlap with and are as complex as issues of identity. We are often caught between the crossfire of realism and perpetuating stereotypes, especially when it comes to sensitive subjects. For instance, in how we represent the problem of alcoholism in our work

or, simply, in how we discuss individual family/tribal history. For me, being Indian in the United States is filled with innumerable complexities and mixed feelings, but ultimately I have to attend to the business of interrogating damaging stereotypes and representations of Indians for the sake of my children. I take this as my duty, which it certainly is, not only for my own children, but the children who are entrusted to me throughout the school year.

I relate my story to that of my family and the people I am descended from, and it goes without saying that I cannot separate my story from theirs. We are a rural, reservation people and nothing in my memory is sparked by a single artistic influence. But I should qualify that statement. The women of my family have all been beadworkers, including myself, although this is not out of the ordinary where I come from. I have always felt that my family's lives and stories, and therefore my own, are uninteresting, and that we are an ordinary people. I've taken a lot for granted, and it is only through time that I have been able to recognize and distinguish our particular difference.

My grandmother, aunts, uncles, my mother, my sisters, and our combined children are enrolled members of the Spokane tribe of Indians. My ancestors are the *slawtews*, or Chewelah, a band of the Flathead. Among the immediate family (mother, sisters, and our combined children), we represent an amalgamation of tribal groups, including: Flathead, Spokane, Sonoran Mexican Indian, Hopi, Laguna Pueblo, Santo Domingo Pueblo, Thompson (Canadian Native), Haida/Lummi, and Nez Perce. We, my family, are the products of the ongoing process of colonization by virtue of intertribal marriage.

In Chewelah, the night sky mirrored the bowl of the valley held between the dark, lush mountains. In summer, my sisters and I would camp out in our grandparents' yard, making our beds of blankets and sleeping bags in the soft grass. In the fifties, my older sister was in her early teens. She taught us to distinguish the Big Dipper and Little Dipper in the sky — empowering knowledge for the minds of young Indian girls, that. We were comforted and smug in familiar surroundings. Life was so simple. And as we lay beneath the stars, she taught us sappy love songs that she'd learned from the radio, and it didn't take much coaxing on her part. We sang loudly, wildly up to the stars: "Will I be pretty, will I be rich? / *Que sera, sera*, whatever will be, will be." In the morning we shook the earwigs loose that clung to the bottom of our damp blankets and watched them scurry from the sunlight back into the deep grass.

I look back on our lives, which from that early age were instilled with the conflicting values of the world we lived in. On the one hand we learned to appreciate the stories of tribal history and the landbase, to read the sky, to find food in the woods. But then again, we were not encouraged as women to aspire to more than becoming someone's wife, all three of us marrying badly. *Que sera, sera*.

From my family, I have been informed by two conflicting narratives. There is a story my older sister told me about a woman who was captured

by “stick Indians” and taken to the woods, where she lived with them for years. One day, she walked out of the woods and back to her people. It doesn’t matter if the story is true or not. The point is that the story became family mythology that touched my life.

My father also tells a story of his ancestors, who came into this country from Mexico. This story, too, may not be true. He tells of an ancestor who was the daughter of a wealthy man who did not want his daughter marrying a poor man with whom she had fallen in love. He sent her away by stagecoach, and en route the stagecoach was robbed of its wealth and of the daughter by the man the daughter was forbidden to marry. Both disappeared together. Regardless of the validity of the story, it informs me of that part of myself that I have inherited from my father. What I “read” in my father’s story is the internalization of class distinctions that are made by non-Native peoples. It is the inverted story of the Indian princess all over again — everyone, my father included, wanting to believe themselves descended from royalty, or if not royalty, the next best thing, the monied. I can only speculate as to the source of that wealth in a land notorious for the exploitation of its indigenous people, and would not pride myself for having descended from death-mongers.

Though both my grandparents on my father’s side were very dark-complected people, my father claims he is “Spanish, not Mexican.” At other times, he has claimed that we are descended from the Aztec. In the former, he has learned to deny himself and the part of him that is indigenous, a complete contradiction of how he lives his life as an “Indian” (going to powwows, serving on the Indian PTA, fathering Indian children, and collecting powwow music). How his contradictory attitude impacts on my perception as his offspring is that I choose to accept his parents, whom I never knew, as Native Mexican peoples. As Indian.

These stories that have informed my life have also informed my dreamscape: where stick Indians live, and a former life where I was also captive of a Mexican husband, but ran off from the hacienda with the gardener. I have no doubt that stick Indians *do* live, and that the gardener in my dream of my former life explains the connection to the father of my older daughters, a Pueblo.

In my mind, I am not any more Aztec than I am “Spanish.” In my reality, my father is descended from Mexican itinerant workers: Mexican Indians. In an old photograph of his parents, they are a dark-skinned people: his mother is very round, her body like a mountain, as solid; his father is a sinewy-bodied man, the product of hard work. By heredity, it could be possible to call myself chicana, though I have been socialized as Indian. This is how I know myself.

To return to the subject of Indians oppressing other Indians, as mentioned earlier, and how this has affected my life, I offer another story. On the reservation, tribal politics are not all that different from mainstream politics — which are bound to issues of power, how it corrupts, how it is wielded unethically. Back home several years ago, one member of the

Tribal Council had pushed a law through that allowed the enrollment of children who had one parent of Canadian Native descent in order to enroll his grandchildren. Ironically, Canadian Natives are not considered Indian, in spite of the fact that several of the northern-border tribal groups have families on both sides. Take, for example, the Okanogan band of the Colville, the Blackfeet, the Cree, and Iroquoian peoples.

Enrollments are part of the public record and are published in the tribal newsletter. When my mother saw the announcement of the enrollment of this man's grandchildren, she began the process of application for enrollment for my children whose father is of Canadian Native descent. She filed the necessary paperwork, and was soon notified that the law had been rescinded. My children were enrolled two years later, only after she spoke directly to Tribal Council members, demonstrating through oral repetition of family genealogy how that particular tribal councilman's great-grandfather and ours were blood brothers and how we are related.

There are two parts of my life: growing up on the reservation and then my experience in the educational system, which has separated me from that earlier life. To be eligible to attend BIA boarding schools, you have to be an enrolled member of an Indian tribe. Maybe more to the point is that students come from reservations. Why so few "Native" writers have been educated in that system — uprooted from their homelands, people, and lifestyles — has never, to my knowledge, been raised. It brings up, for me, other related issues. For instance, that the inferior education of Indian children has never become an issue, and that issues of class are not acknowledged. Yet I ask those self-evaluating questions of myself. I look at my participation in the process of undoing the damage that colonization has wrought, and do not hesitate to question, "Am I the product of my own assimilation, the mnemonic device of hegemonic order?" in poem.

What have not been adequately addressed are the many differences between the People and ourselves, meaning Native writers, and these *are* issues of class. I have been educated in a system that is designed to deny us on many levels; but as a participant in that system, which has earned me a "site of privilege" from which to speak, however marginally, what have I become? And if the answer to that question remains continually out of reach, it does not keep me from asking of myself, because I say as I please, is this an act of liberation or the illusion of liberation?

**I HAVE BEEN EDUCATED IN A SYSTEM
THAT IS DESIGNED TO DENY US ON
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WHAT HAVE I BECOME?**

In the United States, the existence of the BIA boarding school system is not common knowledge. In an undergraduate course on

the Brontë sisters, we were discussing the repressed atmosphere of early English boarding schools. The instructor blithely commented on how that system was in the historical past, and assured the class that there weren't such types of schools anymore. I offered that, yes, there were, and in fact, in this country. I mentioned how I'd spent most of my life before and throughout high school in boarding schools that were very much parallel to the oppressive atmosphere of those we were reading about. I was a scholarship student and, needless to say, my comments were not well received in the posh, private school among the bright-eyed eighteen-year-old children of the upper classes, and earned me thereafter the contempt of my instructor.

To return again to the words of Aimé Césaire with which I began, I would like to point out that as a Native person, Césaire addresses the same underlying issues of colonization to which Native people often refer. Although I feel that this is, or should be, a beginning place only, a recognition of the submerged pain that we have inherited. Because in that recognition, perhaps healing can follow. I frequently come in contact with outside perceptions of Native peoples, and cannot help but notice how, in general, there is an unwillingness to interrogate the site of privilege as it filters down through the strata of Native lives in the process of colonization. It is not either bitterness or conflict that motivates my work, though I am sure that some will perceive the material as conflict-motivated. There is a correlation I would like to make between qualitative lived experience and quantitative learned experience that from a Native perspective I feel is missing in our, meaning Native writers', discussions. This requires a willingness to uncover the layering of stereotypes and romanticisms of the public "Indian." For me, what has worked is that through a discussion of where the personal, the public, and political arenas intersect in my life, I can make sense of what "it" means to me. The "it," the dance through the sawing jaws of colonization.

NOTE

¹ From "President Reagan's Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with the Students and Faculty at Moscow State University, May 31, 1988," in *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator*, Internet (p. 10 of 12), March 10, 1998. [Note is Bird's.]

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. As you reread Bird's essay, on each page circle three to four words that seem to you to be central to Bird's questions and arguments. Make a list of these words. Why do these particular terms seem central to you? How do you understand them in the context of Bird's essay and also in the context of your own experience? Be prepared to discuss these questions in a small group.
2. Spend some time rereading the epigraph to Bird's essay, which comes from Aimé Césaire's essay *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950). Make it your project to

study this epigraph. Do some research online: Who was Aimé Césaire? What can you learn about the essay this passage comes from? Finally, make some notes for yourself about what you think this passage suggests. In thinking about Bird's essay, what seems most significant about the epigraph?

3. Consider the full title of Bird's essay, "Autobiography as Spectacle: An Act of Liberation or the Illusion of Liberation?" Why do you think Bird chooses the word *spectacle*? And how do you think Bird answers this question of whether telling one's story is liberating or not? How does her essay complicate your own previous understandings about autobiography?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. In the third "Question for a Second Reading," we invite you to think about Bird's title, "Autobiography as Spectacle: An Act of Liberation or the Illusion of Liberation?" After you've taken notes and done some thinking about the questions raised in that prompt, write an essay in which you engage critically with both Bird's arguments and her questions about autobiography.

What are Bird's assertions and questions about autobiography? Where does she seem to make an argument, and where does she seem to raise questions? How can you tell whether an author is making a claim about what is true or whether the author is uncertain? How might Bird's moments of uncertainty be imagined as productive or as part of the point of the essay? What is your position on both Bird's arguments and her questions? Do you have new questions of your own about "autobiography as spectacle"?

2. Bird provides us with an extensive discussion of and excerpt from Ronald Reagan's comments on Native Americans from 1988. Additionally, she provides examples of representations of Native Americans in film. She offers readings of her examples, providing her interpretations and perspective on what she hears and sees in these examples. We might think of Bird, in these moments, as "reading culture," as looking closely at how the subject at hand (Native Americans) is discussed, represented, and understood by others.

Bird worked on this essay in the late 1990s; one question worth thinking about is what Bird might notice about our current moment in history. Do some research in which you try to look for current examples of how Native Americans are discussed, represented, and understood by others. To help you get started, you might consider looking at discussions of professional sports logos or the problematic town seal of Whitesboro, New York. These are just two examples of when and how Native Americans have been discussed, represented, and understood by those outside their communities.

Write an essay in which you choose two to three examples you find in the media. What might Bird say about these examples? How does her essay help you "read culture" so that you can provide the readers of your essay with interpretations and critiques of what you find? You should quote both

from the representations you find and from Bird's essay as a way of giving your readers both a window into Bird's essay and a sense of how Bird's essay might help us "read culture."

3. One of Bird's central terms in this essay is *colonialism*. What do you know about this term? You might want to do some research about the term itself and how it is used and circulated. What histories or current events is Bird drawing to our attention by using this term, which appears both in her essay and in the epigraph to the essay?

Write an essay in which you explain to another person how Bird's essay relates to colonialism. You might start by helping your reader understand what colonialism means, what Bird's essay is about, and how these two elements are related. Then, in your essay itself, you'll want to explain the relationship between colonialism and autobiography and between colonialism and representations of Native Americans.

You might end by explaining to this imagined person how this discussion is relevant to some current events that might be happening around you right now. Why is the term *colonialism* significant? And how does thinking about this concept further our thinking about social justice, identity, or history?



MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Many of the essays in this collection make use of or raise questions about autobiography as a way of thinking about social justice, political questions, and cultural representation. For example, we might understand writers like John Edgar Wideman, Joy Castro, Jennine Capó Crucet, Susan Griffin, Edward Said, Alison Bechdel, and, of course, Gloria Bird, as addressing questions about autobiography.

Choose two or three of these writers and begin to develop your own theory of autobiography using specific passages from each writer's work to interrogate, develop, and support your own claims about autobiography. Your essay could consider questions such as the following: What does it mean to do the work of autobiography? How do you understand the relationship between personal experience and intellectual ideas? What work can autobiography do for the writer and/or readers? What does your own experience writing about your own life tell you about these questions? And, finally, what are the difficulties and rewards of writing autobiographical essays?

2. Bird writes of her son that he "came home from school with homework in social studies in which one of his questions required his answering that *wampum belts* = *money*. Commodification of Native systems of documenting agreements is a gross misinterpretation" (pp. 170–71).

Bird may be pointing out that Euro-American "readers" see Native American traditions and communities through the lens of their own understanding of the world — thus, the Euro-American lens fails to see or understand at all.

Ruth Behar, in "The Vulnerable Observer," (p. 109) also has some interesting ideas about this question of who is looking at whom and what they see. What do you imagine Behar might say about Bird's essay? How might Behar extend, complicate, or understand Bird's questions and claims? How do these two writers together offer a way of understanding what it means to see others, to talk about others, and to represent others? And, finally, how do these two writers together offer a way of understanding what it means to see ourselves as well?



JUDITH Butler

Judith Butler is the Maxine Elliot Professor in the departments of rhetoric and comparative literature at the University of California at Berkeley. She is also the Hannah Arendt Professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, where she teaches an intensive summer seminar. She was an undergraduate at Bennington College and then Yale University; she received her PhD in philosophy from Yale in 1984. Her first training as a philosopher, she said, was at the synagogue in her hometown, Cleveland.

Butler is a prolific and controversial writer whose topics range from gender to sexuality to war. Her books include *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987); *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997); *Precarious Life: Powers of Violence and Mourning* (2004); and *Undoing Gender* (2004), a collection of essays, including the selection that follows. More recently she has published *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2012), *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013, with Athena Athanasiou), *Senses of the Subject* (2015), and *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015).

Butler's second book, *Gender Trouble*, was extraordinarily successful — that is, it was widely read around the world, translated into several languages, taught in graduate and undergraduate seminars, and referenced in thousands of books and essays. It is, perhaps, one of the most important books of its time; it remains profoundly influential. The argument calls into question the commonplace and controlling assumption that human beings are divided into two clear-cut groups, men and women. Butler challenges this binary, demonstrating that much that is taken for granted about gender is problematic, even illogical. Whatever the individual body, gender identity is more complicated, more diverse, more flexible than assumed by a simple binary, male and female. Gender identity, she argues, is "performative"; it is not the natural result of who we are biologically; it is a product, rather, of how we think, act, imagine, and desire, and these performances are subject to change.

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; . . . identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (*Gender Trouble*, p. 25)

This was the compelling and difficult conclusion: although gender identity is shaped by cultural norms and conventions, and although bodies and biology matter, gender identity is mutable, available to change. It is open to revision, resistance, subversion, and improvisation — sometimes willed, sometimes not. This thought was terrifying for some and liberating for others.

Butler is known for the difficulty of her prose. In fact, the difficulty could be said to be exemplary. In 1998, she was announced as the “winner” of a Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*, where her prose was singled out for its “anxiety-inducing obscurity.” The incident garnered substantial attention in the academic and popular press and became an important point of reference as the nation tried to sort out its relation to the academy, to intellectuals, and to their attempts to bring critical theory to bear on matters of daily life and common concern. In her response to the award, Butler pointed out that the “winners” tended to be people who were writing against common-sense understandings of gender, race, class, and nation. She argued that prose is easy to read when it says what we already know and believe, but that it is harder to read (and to write) a prose that is struggling against the usual ways of thinking and speaking.

There is a lot in ordinary language and in received grammar that constrains our thinking. . . . I’m not sure we’re going to be able to struggle effectively against those constraints or work within them in a productive way unless we see the ways in which grammar is both producing and constraining our sense of what the world is. (*Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, pp. 732–33)

Anxiety, perhaps, is the necessary effect of such a project, an alternative to complacency. And so, she concluded in a *New York Times* op-ed article, the controversy was not so much about her prose as about what was appropriate in the classroom and in academic life: “We have an intellectual disagreement about what kind of world we want to live in, and what intellectual resources we must preserve as we make our way toward the politically new.”

The other side of the argument is easier to grasp and easier to represent — that such prose is self-indulgent, divisive, posturing, disrespectful of its audience. One thing is certain, however. Butler is widely read and widely cited and is one of the most important, controversial, and influential theorists of our time. Her writing has changed the ways we think, speak, and write about sexuality, gender, and desire. The selection that follows thinks about gender identity in relation to the question of what “constitutes the human,” who is granted this recognition and who is not. Butler raises this as a philosophical question, but she is also very interested in the political, in the actual human beings whose lives bear the consequence of being understood as impossible, illegible, and thereby alien, located outside the common understandings of what it means to be a person.

UNDOING GENDER
JUDITH BUTLER



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Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy

What makes for a livable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people in various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers, then that is a conclusion I am happy to embrace. It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not. There is always a risk of anthropocentrism here if one assumes that the distinctively human life is valuable — or most valuable — or is the only way to think the problem of value. But

perhaps to counter that tendency it is necessary to ask both the question of life and the question of the human, and not to let them fully collapse into one another.

I would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life? I believe that whatever differences exist within the international gay and lesbian community, and there are many, we all have some notion

of what it is to have lost somebody. And if we've lost, then it seems to follow that we have had, that we have desired and loved, and struggled to find the conditions for our desire. We have all lost someone in recent decades from AIDS, but there are other losses that inflict us, other diseases; moreover, we are, as a community, subjected to violence, even if some of us individually have not been. And this means that we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies; we are constituted as fields of desire and physical vulnerability, at once publicly assertive and vulnerable.

I am not sure I know when mourning is successful, or when one has fully mourned another human being. I'm certain, though, that it does not mean that one has forgotten the person, or that something else comes along to take his or her place. I don't think it works that way. I think instead that one mourns when one accepts the fact that the loss one

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undergoes will be one that changes you, changes you possibly forever, and that mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation the full result of which you cannot know in advance. So there is losing, and there is the transformative effect of loss, and this latter cannot be charted or planned. I don't think, for instance, you can invoke a Protestant ethic when it comes to loss. You can't say, "Oh, I'll go through loss this way, and that will be the result, and I'll apply myself to the task, and I'll endeavor to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me." I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and one finds oneself foiled. One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one's own deliberate plan or project, larger than one's own knowing. Something takes hold, but is this something coming from the self, from the outside, or from some region where the difference between the two is indeterminable? What is it that claims us at such moments, such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?

It may seem that one is undergoing something temporary, but it could be that in this experience something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that those ties constitute a sense of self, compose who we are, and that when we lose them, we lose our composure in some fundamental sense: we do not know who we are or what to do. Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation, but I think it exposes the constitutive sociality of the self, a basis for thinking a political community of a complex order.

It is not just that I might be said to "have" these relations, or that I might sit back and view them at a distance, enumerating them, explaining what this friendship means, what that lover meant or means to me. On the contrary, grief displays the way in which we are in the thrall of our relations with others that we cannot always recount or explain, that often interrupts the self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control. I might try to tell a story about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very "I" who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling. The very "I" is called into question by its relation to the one to whom I address myself. This relation to the Other does not precisely ruin my story or reduce me to speechlessness, but it does, invariably, clutter my speech with signs of its undoing.

Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. And so when we speak about *my* sexuality or *my* gender, as we do (and as we must), we mean something complicated by it. Neither of these is precisely a possession, but both are to be understood as *modes of being dispossessed*, ways of being for another or, indeed, by virtue of another. It does not suffice

to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one, or trying to redescribe autonomy in terms of relationality. The term "relationality" sutures the rupture in the relation we seek to describe, a rupture that is constitutive of identity itself. This means that we will have to approach the problem of conceptualizing dispossession with circumspection. One way of doing this is through the notion of ecstasy.

We tend to narrate the history of the broader movement for sexual freedom in such a way that ecstasy figures in the 60s and 70s and persists midway through the 80s. But maybe ecstasy is more historically persistent than that, maybe it is with us all along. To be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and this can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief. I think that if I can still speak to a "we," and include myself within its terms, I am speaking to those of us who are living in certain ways *beside ourselves*, whether it is in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage. In a sense, the predicament is to understand what kind of community is composed of those who are beside themselves.

We have an interesting political predicament, since most of the time when we hear about "rights," we understand them as pertaining to individuals, or when we argue for protection against discrimination, we argue as a group or a class. And in that language and in that context, we have to present ourselves as bounded beings, distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law, a community defined by sameness. Indeed, we had better be able to use that language to secure legal protections and entitlements. But perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about. Although this language might well establish our legitimacy within a legal framework ensconced in liberal versions of human ontology, it fails to do justice to passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, and implicate us in lives that are not our own, sometimes fatally, irreversibly.

It is not easy to understand how a political community is wrought from such ties. One speaks, and one speaks for another, to another, and yet there is no way to collapse the distinction between the other and myself. When we say "we" we do nothing more than designate this as very problematic. We do not solve it. And perhaps it is, and ought to be, insoluble. We ask that the state, for instance, keep its laws off our bodies, and we call for principles of bodily self-defense and bodily integrity to be accepted as political goods. Yet, it is through the body that gender and sexuality become exposed to others, implicated in social processes, inscribed by cultural norms, and apprehended in their social meanings. In a sense, to be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, "one's own," that over which we must claim rights of autonomy. This is as true for the claims made by lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in favor of sexual freedom as it is for transsexual and transgender claims to self-determination; as it is for intersex claims to be free of coerced medical, surgical, and psychiatric interventions; as it is for all claims to be free from racist attacks,

physical and verbal; and as it is for feminism's claim to reproductive freedom. It is difficult, if not impossible, to make these claims without recourse to autonomy and, specifically, a sense of bodily autonomy. Bodily autonomy, however, is a lively paradox. I am not suggesting, though, that we cease to make these claims. We have to, we must. And I'm not saying that we have to make these claims reluctantly or strategically. They are part of the normative aspiration of any movement that seeks to maximize the protection and the freedoms of sexual and gender minorities, of women, defined with the broadest possible compass, of racial and ethnic minorities, especially as they cut across all the other categories. But is there another normative aspiration that we must also seek to articulate and to defend? Is there a way in which the place of the body in all of these struggles opens up a different conception of politics?

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where "doing" and "being done to" become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. Indeed, if I seek to deny the fact that my body relates me — against my will and from the start — to others I do not choose to have in proximity to myself (the subway or the tube are excellent examples of this dimension of sociality), and if I build a notion of "autonomy" on the basis of the denial of this sphere or a primary and unwilling physical proximity with others, then do I precisely deny the social and political conditions of my embodiment in the name of autonomy? If I am struggling *for* autonomy, do I not need to be struggling for something else as well, a conception of myself as invariably in community, impressed upon by others, impressing them as well, and in ways that are not always clearly delineable, in forms that are not fully predictable?

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres but also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community in such a way that it becomes incumbent upon us to consider very carefully when and where we engage violence, for violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves, for one another?

If we might then return to the problem of grief, to the moments in which one undergoes something outside of one's control and finds that one is beside oneself, not at one with oneself, we can say grief contains within it the possibility of apprehending the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are from the start, and by virtue of

being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own. Can this situation, one that is so dramatic for sexual minorities, one that establishes a very specific political perspective for anyone who works in the field of sexual and gender politics, supply a perspective with which to begin to apprehend the contemporary global situation?

Mourning, fear, anxiety, rage. In the United States after September 11, 2001, we have been everywhere surrounded with violence, of having perpetrated it, having suffered it, living in fear of it, planning more of it. Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another. To the extent that we commit violence, we are acting upon another, putting others at risk, causing damage to others. In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, but this vulnerability becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions. Although the dominant mode in the United States has been to shore up sovereignty and security to minimize or, indeed, foreclose this vulnerability, it can serve another function and another ideal. The fact that our lives are dependent on others can become the basis of claims for nonmilitaristic political solutions, one which we cannot will away, one which we must attend to, even abide by, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself.

Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, remaining exposed to its apparent tolerability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework by which we think our international ties? If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? The attempt to foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense [of] every other human consideration, is surely also to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way.

To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to a simple passivity or powerlessness. It is, rather, to allow oneself to extrapolate from this experience of vulnerability to the vulnerability that others suffer through military incursions, occupations, suddenly declared wars, and police brutality. That our very survival can be determined by those we do not know and over whom there is no final control means that life is precarious, and that politics must consider what forms of social and political organization seek best to sustain precarious lives across the globe.

There is a more general conception of the human at work here, one in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we

are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself, and by virtue of our embodiment, given over to an other: this makes us vulnerable to violence, but also to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other.

We cannot endeavor to "rectify" this situation. And we cannot recover the source of this vulnerability, for it precedes the formation of "I." This condition of being laid bare from the start, dependent on those we do not know, is one with which we cannot precisely argue. We come into the world unknowing and dependent, and, to a certain degree, we remain that way. We can try, from the point of view of autonomy, to argue with this situation, but we are perhaps foolish, if not dangerous, when we do. Of course, we can say that for some this primary scene is extraordinary, loving, and receptive, a warm tissue of relations that support and nurture life in its infancy. For others, this is, however, a scene of abandonment or violence or starvation; they are bodies given over to nothing, or to brutality, or to no sustenance. No matter what the valence of that scene is, however, the fact remains that infancy constitutes a necessary dependency, one that we never fully leave behind. Bodies still must be apprehended as given over. Part of understanding the oppression of lives is precisely to understand that there is no way to argue away this condition of a primary vulnerability, of being given over to the touch of the other, even if, or precisely when, there is no other there, and no support for our lives. To counter oppression requires that one understand that lives are supported and maintained differentially, that there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. And other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as "grievable."

What are the cultural contours of the notion of the human at work here? And how do the contours that we accept as the cultural frame for the human limit the extent to which we can avow loss as loss? This is surely a question that lesbian, gay, and bi-studies has asked in relation to violence against sexual minorities, and that transgendered people have asked as they have been singled out for harassment and sometimes murder, and that intersexed people have asked, whose formative years have so often been marked by an unwanted violence against their bodies in the name of a normative notion of human morphology. This is no doubt as well the basis of a profound affinity between movements centered on gender and sexuality with efforts to counter the normative human morphologies and capacities that condemn or efface those who are physically challenged. It must, as well, also be part of the affinity with antiracist struggles, given the racial differential that undergirds the culturally viable notions of the human — ones that we see acted out in dramatic and terrifying ways in the global arena at the present time.

So what is the relation between violence and what is "unreal," between violence and unreality that attends to those who become the victims of

violence, and where does the notion of the ungrievable life come in? On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level. This level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization, which is already at work in the culture.

So it is not just that a discourse exists in which there is no frame and no story and no name for such a life, or that violence might be said to realize or apply this discourse. Violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark. If there is a discourse, it is a silent and melancholic writing in which there have been no lives, and no losses, there has been no common physical condition, no vulnerability that serves as the basis for an apprehension of our commonality, and there has been no sundering of that commonality. None of this takes place on the order of the event. None of this takes place. How many lives have been lost from AIDS in Africa in the last few years? Where are the media representations of this loss, the discursive elaborations of what these losses mean for communities there?

I began this chapter with a suggestion that perhaps the interrelated movements and modes of inquiry that collect here might need to consider

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autonomy as one dimension of their normative aspirations, one value to realize when we ask ourselves, in what direction ought we to proceed, and what kinds of values ought we to be realizing? I suggested as well that the way in which the body figures in gender and sexuality studies, and in the struggles for a less oppres-

sive social world for the otherwise gendered and for sexual minorities of all kinds, is precisely to underscore the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and resituated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive center. The particular sociality that belongs to bodily life, to sexual life, and to becoming gendered (which is always, to a certain extent, becoming gendered *for others*) establishes a field of ethical enmeshment with others and a sense of disorientation for the first-person, that is, the perspective of the ego. As bodies, we are always for something more than, and other than, ourselves. To articulate this as an entitlement is not always easy, but perhaps not impossible. It suggests, for instance, that "association" is not a luxury, but one of the very conditions and prerogatives of freedom. Indeed, the kinds of associations we maintain importantly take many forms. It will not do to extol the marriage norm as the new ideal for this movement, as the Human Rights Campaign has erroneously done.¹ No doubt, marriage and same-sex domestic partnerships should certainly be available as options, but to install either as a model for sexual legitimacy is precisely to constrain the sociality of the body in acceptable ways. In light

of seriously damaging judicial decisions against second parent adoptions in recent years, it is crucial to expand our notions of kinship beyond the heterosexual frame. It would be a mistake, however, to reduce kinship to family, or to assume that all sustaining community and friendship ties are extrapolations of kin relations.

I make the argument [elsewhere]. . . that kinship ties that bind persons to one another may well be no more or less than the intensification of community ties, may or may not be based on enduring or exclusive sexual relations, may well consist of ex-lovers, nonlovers, friends, and community members. The relations of kinship cross the boundaries between community and family and sometimes redefine the meaning of friendship as well. When these modes of intimate association produce sustaining webs of relationships, they constitute a "breakdown" of traditional kinship that displaces the presumption that biological and sexual relations structure kinship centrally. In addition, the incest taboo that governs kinship ties, producing a necessary exogamy, does not necessarily operate among friends in the same way or, for that matter, in networks of communities. Within these frames, sexuality is no longer exclusively regulated by the rules of kinship at the same time that the durable tie can be situated outside of the conjugal frame. Sexuality becomes open to a number of social articulations that do not always imply binding relations or conjugal ties. That not all of our relations last or are meant to, however, does not mean that we are immune to grief. On the contrary, sexuality outside the field of monogamy well may open us to a different sense of community, intensifying the question of where one finds enduring ties, and so become the condition for an attunement to losses that exceed a discretely private realm.

Nevertheless, those who live outside the conjugal frame or maintain modes of social organization for sexuality that are neither monogamous nor quasi-marital are more and more considered unreal, and their loves and losses less than "true" loves and "true" losses. The derealization of this domain of human intimacy and sociality works by denying reality and truth to the relations at issue.

The question of who and what is considered real and true is apparently a question of knowledge. But it is also, as Michel Foucault makes plain, a question of power. Having or bearing "truth" and "reality" is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimulates as ontology. According to Foucault, one of the first tasks of a radical critique is to discern the relation "between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge."² Here we are confronted with the limits of what is knowable, limits that exercise a certain force, but are not grounded in any necessity, limits that can only be read or interrogated by risking a certain security through departing from an established ontology: "[N]othing can exist as an element of knowledge if, on the one hand, it . . . does not conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of a given type of scientific discourse in a given period, and if, on the other hand, it does not possess the effects of coercion or simply the

incentives peculiar to what is scientifically validated or simply rational or simply generally accepted, etc."³ Knowledge and power are not finally separable but work together to establish a set of subtle and explicit criteria for thinking the world: "It is therefore not a matter of describing what knowledge is and what power is and how one would repress the other or how the other would abuse the one, but rather, a nexus of knowledge-power has to be described so that we can grasp what constitutes the acceptability of a system. . . ."⁴

What this means is that one looks *both* for the conditions by which the object field is constituted, and for *the limits* of those conditions. The limits are to be found where the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, the site where conditions are contingent, transformable. In Foucault's terms, "schematically speaking, we have perpetual mobility, essential fragility or rather the complex interplay between what replicates the same process and what transforms it."⁵ To intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality, and to use, as it were, one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim. I think that when the unreal lays claim to reality, or enters into its domain, something other than a simple assimilation into prevailing norms can and does take place. The norms themselves can become rattled, display their instability, and become open to resignification.

In recent years, the new gender politics has offered numerous challenges from transgendered and transsexual peoples to established feminist and lesbian / gay frameworks, and the intersex movement has rendered more complex the concerns and demands of sexual rights advocates. If some on the Left thought that these concerns were not properly or substantively political, they have been under pressure to rethink the political sphere in terms of its gendered and sexual presuppositions. The suggestion that butch, femme, and transgendered lives are not essential referents for a refashioning of political life, and for a more just and equitable society, fails to acknowledge the violence that the otherwise gendered suffer in the public world and fails as well to recognize that embodiment denotes a contested set of norms governing who will count as a viable subject within the sphere of politics. Indeed, if we consider that human bodies are not experienced without recourse to some ideality, some frame for experience itself, and that this is as true for the experience of one's own body as it is for experiencing another, and if we accept that that ideality and frame are socially articulated, we can see how it is that embodiment is not thinkable without a relation to a norm, or a set of norms. The struggle to rework the norms by which bodies are experienced is thus crucial not only to disability politics, but to the intersex and transgendered movements as they contest forcibly imposed ideals of what bodies ought to be like. The embodied relation to the norm exercises a transformative potential. To posit possibilities beyond the norm or, indeed, a different future for the norm itself, is part of the work of fantasy when we understand fantasy as taking the body as a point of departure for an

articulation that is not always constrained by the body as it is. If we accept that altering these norms that decide normative human morphology gives differential "reality" to different kinds of humans as a result, then we are compelled to affirm that transgendered lives have a potential and actual impact on political life at its most fundamental level, that is, who counts as a human, and what norms govern the appearance of "real" humanness.

Moreover, fantasy is part of the articulation of the possible; it moves us beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable. The struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy — through censorship, degradation, or other means — is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.

How do drag, butch, femme, transgender, transsexual persons enter into the political field? They make us not only question what is real, and what "must" be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can become instituted. These practices of instituting new modes of reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished fact, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone. Some people have asked me what is the use of increasing possibilities for gender. I tend to answer: Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread. I think we should not underestimate what the thought of the possible does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent. If the answer to the question, is life possible, is yes, that is surely something significant. It cannot, however, be taken for granted as the answer. That is a question whose answer is sometimes "no," or one that has no ready answer, or one that bespeaks an ongoing agony. For many who can and do answer the question in the affirmative, that answer is hard won, if won at all, an accomplishment that is fundamentally conditioned by reality being structured or restructured in such a way that the affirmation becomes possible.

One of the central tasks of lesbian and gay international rights is to assert in clear and public terms the reality of homosexuality, not as an inner truth, not as a sexual practice, but as one of the defining features of the social world in its very intelligibility. In other words, it is one thing to assert the reality of lesbian and gay lives as a reality, and to insist that these are lives worthy of protection in their specificity and commonality; but it is quite another to insist that the very public assertion of gayness calls into

question what counts as reality and what counts as a human life. Indeed, the task of international lesbian and gay politics is no less than a remaking of reality, a reconstituting of the human, and a brokering of the question, what is and is not livable? So what is the injustice opposed by such work? I would put it this way: to be called unreal and to have that call, as it were, institutionalized as a form of differential treatment, is to become the other against whom (or against which) the human is made. It is the inhuman, the beyond the human, the less than human, the border that secures the human in its ostensible reality. To be called a copy, to be called unreal, is one way in which one can be oppressed, but consider that it is more fundamental than that. To be oppressed means that you already exist as a subject of some kind, you are there as the visible and oppressed other for the master subject, as a possible or potential subject, but to be unreal is something else again. To be oppressed you must first become intelligible. To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor.

We might think that the question of how one does one's gender is a merely cultural question, or an indulgence on the part of those who insist on exercising bourgeois freedom in excessive dimensions. To say, however, that gender is performative is not simply to insist on a right to produce a pleasurable and subversive spectacle but to allegorize the spectacular and consequential ways in which reality is both reproduced and contested. This has consequences for how gender presentations are criminalized and pathologized, how subjects who cross gender risk internment and imprisonment, why violence against transgendered subjects is not recognized as violence, and why this violence is sometimes inflicted by the very states that should be offering such subjects protection from violence.

What if new forms of gender are possible? How does this affect the ways that we live and the concrete needs of the human community? And how are we to distinguish between forms of gender possibility that are valuable and those that are not? I would say that it is not a question merely of producing a new future for genders that do not yet exist. The genders I have in mind have been in existence for a long time, but they have not been admitted into the terms that govern reality. So it is a question of developing within law, psychiatry, social, and literary theory a new legitimating lexicon for the gender complexity that we have been living for a long time. Because the norms governing reality have not admitted these forms to be real, we will, of necessity, call them "new."

What place does the thinking of the possible have within political theorizing? Is the problem that we have no norm to distinguish among kinds of possibility, or does that only appear to be a problem if we fail to comprehend "possibility" itself as a norm? Possibility is an aspiration, something we might hope will be equitably distributed, something that

might be socially secured, something that cannot be taken for granted, especially if it is apprehended phenomenologically. The point is not to prescribe new gender norms, as if one were under an obligation to supply a measure, gauge, or norm for the adjudication of competing gender presentations. The normative aspiration at work here has to do with the ability to live and breathe and move and would no doubt belong somewhere in what is called a philosophy of freedom. The thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity.

It was Spinoza who claimed that every human being seeks to persist in his own being, and he made this principle of self-persistence, the *conatus*, into the basis of his ethics and, indeed, his politics. When Hegel made the claim that desire is always a desire for recognition, he was, in a way, extrapolating upon this Spinozistic point, telling us, effectively, that to persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition. If we are not recognizable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility. We think of norms of recognition perhaps as residing already in a cultural world into which we are born, but these norms change, and with the changes in these norms come changes in what does and does not count as recognizably human. To twist the Hegelian argument in a Foucaultian direction: norms of recognition function to produce and to deproduce the notion of the human. This is made true in a specific way when we consider how international norms work in the context of lesbian and gay human rights, especially as they insist that certain kinds of violences are impermissible, that certain lives are vulnerable and worthy of protection, that certain deaths are grievable and worthy of public recognition.

To say that the desire to persist in one's own being depends on norms of recognition is to say that the basis of one's autonomy, one's persistence as an "I" through time, depends fundamentally on a social norm that exceeds that "I," that positions that "I" ec-statically, outside of itself in a world of complex and historically changing norms. In effect, our lives, our very persistence, depend upon such norms or, at least, on the possibility that we will be able to negotiate within them, derive our agency from the field of their operation. In our very ability to persist, we are dependent on what is outside of us, on a broader sociality, and this dependency is the basis of our endurance and survivability. When we assert our "right," as we do and we must, we are not carving out a place for our autonomy — if by autonomy we mean a state of individuation, taken as self-persisting prior to and apart from any relations of dependency on the world of others. We do not negotiate with norms or with Others subsequent to our coming into the world. We come into the world on the condition that the social world is already there, laying the groundwork for us. This implies that I cannot persist without norms of recognition that support my persistence: the

sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself. My reflexivity is not only socially mediated, but socially constituted. I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me. In this sense, I am outside myself from the outset, and must be, in order to survive, and in order to enter into the realm of the possible.

To assert sexual rights, then, takes on a specific meaning against this background. It means, for instance, that when we struggle for rights, we are not simply struggling for rights that attach to my person, but we are struggling *to be conceived as persons*. And there is a difference between the former and the latter. If we are struggling for rights that attach, or should attach, to my personhood, then we assume that personhood as already constituted. But if we are struggling not only to be conceived as persons, but to create a social transformation of the very meaning of personhood, then the assertion of rights becomes a way of intervening into the social and political process by which the human is articulated. International human rights is always in the process of sub-

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jecting the human to redefinition and renegotiation. It mobilizes the human in the service of rights, but also rewrites the human and rearticulates the human when it comes up against the cultural limits of its working conception of the human, as it does and must.

Lesbian and gay human rights takes sexuality, in some sense, to be its issue. Sexuality is not simply an attribute one has or a disposition or patterned set of inclinations. It is a mode of being disposed toward others, including in the mode of fantasy, and sometimes only in the mode of fantasy. If we are outside of ourselves as sexual beings, given over from the start, crafted in part through primary relations of dependency and attachment, then it would seem that our being beside ourselves, outside ourselves, is there as a function of sexuality itself, where sexuality is not this or that dimension of our existence, not the key or bedrock of our existence, but, rather, as coextensive with existence, as Merleau-Ponty once aptly suggested.⁶

I have tried here to argue that our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have. *This means that the ec-static character of our existence is essential to the possibility of persisting as human.* In this sense, we can see how sexual rights brings together two related domains of ec-stasy, two connected ways of being outside of ourselves. As sexual, we are dependent on a world of others, vulnerable to need, violence, betrayal, compulsion, fantasy; we project desire, and we have it projected onto us. To be part of a sexual minority means, most emphatically, that we are also dependent on the protection of public and private spaces, on legal sanctions that protect us from violence,

on safeguards of various institutional kinds against unwanted aggression imposed upon us, and the violent actions they sometimes instigate. In this sense, our very lives, and the persistence of our desire, depend on there being norms of recognition that produce and sustain our viability as human. Thus, when we speak about sexual rights, we are not merely talking about rights that pertain to our individual desires but to the norms on which our very individuality depends. That means that the discourse of rights avows our dependency, the mode of our being in the hands of others, a mode of being with and for others without which we cannot be.

I served for a few years on the board of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, a group that is located in San Francisco. It is part of a broad international coalition of groups and individuals who struggle to establish both equality and justice for sexual minorities, including transgender and intersexed individuals as well as persons with HIV or AIDS.⁷ What astonished me time and again was how often the organization was asked to respond to immediate acts of violence against sexual minorities, especially when that violence was not redressed in any way by local police or government in various places in the globe. I had to reflect on what sort of anxiety is prompted by the public appearance of someone who is openly gay, or presumed to be gay, someone whose gender does not conform to norms, someone whose sexuality defies public prohibitions, someone whose body does not conform with certain morphological ideals. What motivates those who are driven to kill someone for being gay, to threaten to kill someone for being intersexed, or would be driven to kill because of the public appearance of someone who is transgendered?

The desire to kill someone, or killing someone, for not conforming to the gender norm by which a person is "supposed" to live suggests that life itself requires a set of sheltering norms, and that to be outside it, to live outside it, is to court death. The person who threatens violence proceeds from the anxious and rigid belief that a sense of world and a sense of self will be radically undermined if such a being, uncategorizable, is permitted to live within the social world. The negation, through violence, of that body is a vain and violent effort to restore order, to renew the social world on the basis of intelligible gender, and to refuse the challenge to rethink that world as something other than natural or necessary. This is not far removed from the threat of death, or the murder itself, of transsexuals in various countries, and of gay men who read as "feminine" or gay women who read as "masculine." These crimes are not always immediately recognized as criminal acts. Sometimes they are denounced by governments and international agencies; sometimes they are not included as legible or real crimes against humanity by those very institutions.

If we oppose this violence, then we oppose it in the name of what? What is the alternative to this violence, and for what transformation of the social world do I call? This violence emerges from a profound desire to keep the order of binary gender natural or necessary, to make of it a structure, either natural or cultural, or both, that no human can oppose, and still remain human. If a person opposes norms of binary gender not just by having a

critical point of view about them, but by incorporating norms critically, and that stylized opposition is legible, then it seems that violence emerges precisely as the demand to undo that legibility, to question its possibility, to render it unreal and impossible in the face of its appearance to the contrary. This is, then, no simple difference in points of view. To counter that embodied opposition by violence is to say, effectively, that this body, this challenge to an accepted version of the world is and shall be unthinkable. The effort to enforce the boundaries of what will be regarded as real requires stalling what is contingent, frail, open to fundamental transformation in the gendered order of things.

An ethical query emerges in light of such an analysis: how might we encounter the difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that the difference delivers? What might it mean to learn to live in the anxiety of that challenge, to feel the surety of one's epistemological and ontological anchor go, but to be

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willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be? This means that we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take. It means we must be open to its permutations, in the name of nonviolence. As Adriana Cavarero points out,

paraphrasing Arendt, the question we pose to the Other is simple and unanswerable: "who are you?"⁸ The violent response is the one that does not ask, and does not seek to know. It wants to shore up what it knows, to expunge what threatens it with not-knowing, what forces it to reconsider the presuppositions of its world, their contingency, their malleability. The nonviolent response lives with its unknowingness about the Other in the face of the Other, since sustaining the bond that the question opens is finally more valuable than knowing in advance what holds us in common, as if we already have all the resources we need to know what defines the human, what its future life might be.

That we cannot predict or control what permutations of the human might arise does not mean that we must value all possible permutations of the human; it does not mean that we cannot struggle for the realization of certain values, democratic and nonviolent, international and anti-racist. The point is only that to struggle for those values is precisely to avow that one's own position is not sufficient to elaborate the spectrum of the human, that one must enter into a collective work in which one's own status as a subject must, for democratic reasons, become disoriented, exposed to what it does not know.

The point is not to apply social norms to lived social instances, to order and define them (as Foucault has criticized), nor is it to find justificatory

mechanisms for the grounding of social norms that are extrasocial (even as they operate under the name of the social). There are times when both of these activities do and must take place: we level judgments against criminals for illegal acts, and so subject them to a normalizing procedure; we consider our grounds for action in collective contexts and try to find modes of deliberation and reflection about which we can agree. But neither of these is all we do with norms. Through recourse to norms, the sphere of the humanly intelligible is circumscribed, and this circumscription is consequential for any ethics and any conception of social transformation. We might try to claim that we must *first* know the fundamentals of the human in order to preserve and promote human life as we know it. But what if the very categories of the human have excluded those who should be described and sheltered within its terms? What if those who ought to belong to the human do not operate within the modes of reasoning and justifying validity claims that have been proffered by western forms of rationalism? Have we ever yet known the human? And what might it take to approach that knowing? Should we be wary of knowing it too soon or of any final or definitive knowing? If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically and ethically about the consequential ways that the human is being produced, reproduced, and deproduced. This latter inquiry does not exhaust the field of ethics, but I cannot imagine a responsible ethics or theory of social transformation operating without it.

The necessity of keeping our notion of the human open to a future articulation is essential to the project of international human rights discourse and politics. We see this time and again when the very notion of the human is presupposed; the human is defined in advance, in terms that are distinctively western, very often American, and, therefore, partial and parochial. When we start with the human as a foundation, then the human at issue in human rights is already known, already defined. And yet, the human is supposed to be the ground for a set of rights and obligations that are global in reach. How we move from the local to the international (conceived globally in such a way that it does not recirculate the presumption that all humans belong to established nation-states) is a major question for international politics, but it takes a specific form for international lesbian, gay, bi-, trans-, and intersex struggles as well as for feminism. An anti-imperialist or, minimally, nonimperialist conception of international human rights must call into question what is meant by the human and learn from the various ways and means by which it is defined across cultural venues. This means that local conceptions of what is human or, indeed, of what the basic conditions and needs of human life are, must be subjected to reinterpretation, since there are historical and cultural circumstances in which the human is defined differently. Its basic needs and, hence, basic entitlements are made known through various media, through various kinds of practices, spoken and performed.

A reductive relativism would say that we cannot speak of the human or of international human rights, since there are only and always local and

provisional understandings of these terms, and that the generalizations themselves do violence to the specificity of the meanings in question. This is not my view. I'm not ready to rest there. Indeed, I think we are compelled to speak of the human, and of the international, and to find out in particular how human rights do and do not work, for example, in favor of women, of what women are, and what they are not. But to speak in this way, and to call for social transformations in the name of women, we must also be part of a critical democratic project. Moreover, the category of women has been used differentially and with exclusionary aims, and not all women have been included within its terms; women have not been fully incorporated into the human. Both categories are still in process, underway, unfulfilled, thus we do not yet know and cannot ever definitively know in what the human finally consists. This means that we must follow a double path in politics: we must use this language to assert an entitlement to conditions of life in ways that affirm the constitutive role of sexuality and gender in political life, and we must also subject our very categories to critical scrutiny. We must find out the limits of their inclusivity and translatability, the presuppositions they include, the ways in which they must be expanded, destroyed, or reworked both to encompass and open up what it is to be human and gendered. When the United Nations conference at Beijing met a few years ago, there was a discourse on "women's human rights" (or when we hear of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission), which strikes many people as a paradox. Women's human rights? Lesbian and gay human rights? But think about what this coupling actually does. It performs the human as contingent, a category that has in the past, and continues in the present, to define a variable and restricted population, which may or may not include lesbians and gays, may or may not include women, which has several racial and ethnic differentials at work in its operation. It says that such groups have their own set of human rights, that what human may mean when we think about the humanness of women is perhaps different from what human has meant when it has functioned as presumptively male. It also says that these terms are defined, variably, in relation to one another. And we could certainly make a similar argument about race. Which populations have qualified as the human and which have not? What is the history of this category? Where are we in its history at this time?

I would suggest that in this last process, we can only rearticulate or resignify the basic categories of ontology, of being human, of being gendered, of being recognizably sexual, to the extent that we submit ourselves to a process of cultural translation. The point is not to assimilate foreign or unfamiliar notions of gender or humanness into our own as if it is simply a matter of incorporating alienness into an established lexicon. Cultural translation is also a process of yielding our most fundamental categories, that is, seeing how and why they break up, require resignification when they encounter the limits of an available episteme: what is unknown or not yet known. It is crucial to recognize that the notion of the human will only be built over time in and by the process of cultural

translation, where it is not a translation between two languages that stay enclosed, distinct, unified. But rather, *translation will compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other*, and this apprehension, at the limit of what is familiar, parochial, and already known, will be the occasion for both an ethical and social transformation. It will constitute a loss, a disorientation, but one in which the human stands a chance of coming into being anew.

When we ask what makes a life livable, we are asking about certain normative conditions that must be fulfilled for life to become life. And so there are at least two senses of life, the one that refers to the minimum biological form of living, and another that intervenes at the start, which establishes minimum conditions for a livable life with regard to human life.⁹ And this does not imply that we can disregard the merely living in favor of the livable life, but that we must ask, as we asked about gender violence, what humans require in order to maintain and reproduce the conditions of their own livability. And what are our politics such that we are, in whatever way is possible, both conceptualizing the possibility of the livable life, and arranging for its institutional support? There will always be disagreement about what this means, and those who claim that a single political direction is necessitated by virtue of this commitment will be mistaken. But this is only because to live is to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future. To assume responsibility for a future, however, is not to know its direction fully in advance, since the future, especially the future with and for others, requires a certain openness and unknowingness; it implies becoming part of a process the outcome of which no one subject can surely predict. It also implies that a certain agonism and contestation over the course of direction will and must be in play. Contestation must be in play for politics to become democratic. Democracy does not speak in unison; its tunes are dissonant, and necessarily so. It is not a predictable process; it must be undergone, like a passion must be undergone. It may also be that life itself becomes foreclosed when the right way is decided in advance, when we impose what is right for everyone and without finding a way to enter into community, and to discover there the "right" in the midst of cultural translation. It may be that what is right and what is good consist in staying open to the tensions that beset the most fundamental categories we require, in knowing unknowingness at the core of what we know, and what we need, and in recognizing the sign of life in what we undergo without certainty about what will come.

NOTES

¹ The Human Rights Campaign is the main lobbying organization for lesbian and gay rights in the United States. Situated in Washington, D.C., it has maintained that gay marriage is the number one priority of lesbian and gay politics in the U.S. See www.hrc.org. [All notes are Butler's.]

² Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, 50. This essay is reprinted with an essay by me entitled "Critique as Virtue" in David Ingram, *The Political*.

³ "What Is Critique?" 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52–53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

⁷ See www.ighrc.org for more information on the mission and accomplishments of this organization.

⁸ See Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 20–29 and 87–92.

⁹ See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1–12.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Butler's "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" is a philosophical essay, and one of the difficulties it presents to a reader is its emphasis on conceptual language. The sentences most often refer to concepts or ideas rather than to people, places, or events in the concrete, tangible, or observable world. It refers to the *human* or to the *body*, but without telling the stories of particular humans or particular bodies. And this can be frustrating. Without something concrete, without some situation or context in which the conceptual can take shape, these conceptual terms can lose their force or meaning. (If there is a story here, it is the story of a struggle to understand and to articulate a response to the essay's opening question: What makes for a livable world?)

As you reread Butler, pay attention to the conceptual terms that recur. Words like *ethics*, *power*, *life*, *grief*, *agency*, and *possibility* punctuate this essay, and it is through these key terms that Butler attempts to describe and theorize the world we live in. Pick one of these terms (or one of your own choosing) and pay particular attention to the ways it is used. How is it defined in its initial context? Beyond its dictionary definition, what does this particular term come to mean for Butler? For you as a reader? And how is its meaning elaborated or consolidated or complicated by its uses later in the text?

2. At one point, Butler says, "I might try to tell a story about what I am feeling, but it would have to be a story in which the very 'I' who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling. The very 'I' is called into question by its relation to the one to whom I address myself" (p. 183).

As you reread, pay attention to personal pronouns, such as *I*, *we*, *one*, *you*, *our*, *my*, and *your*. In an essay about how we are "constituted," the

struggle to claim identity in relation to others is played out in the arena of the sentence. Choose a paragraph where the play of personal pronouns is particularly odd or rich, and be prepared to describe what Butler is doing. And be prepared to think out loud (or to think on the page) about the relationship between what the writer is doing (the deed of writing) and what the paragraph says.

3. Butler writes in the field of Queer Theory. Queer theorists are concerned with queer lives, queer writing, and the study of gender and sexuality. In "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," Butler raises questions about the visibility, intelligibility, and recognition of gays and lesbians and also about the lives of those who may not conform to any fixed or binary gender norms. She writes:

To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor. (p. 192)

This is a long sentence, and a complicated one. Butler knows this; she knows that it will be difficult for a reader, so she provides what help she can with the parenthetical phrase and the italics. It is useful, as Butler's reader, to practice reading and rereading her sentences, to unfold them slowly, word by word. What does it mean to be "unintelligible"? Why might being unintelligible also mean not having "access to the human" or having a "hollow" language? What examples can you think of that might help someone better understand Butler's claim about gender and sexuality? And, finally, what seems to be at stake in making this claim?

As an exercise in reading and in understanding, write a paraphrase, a translation of this sentence (or a Butler sentence of your own choosing). And in the sentence or sentences of your paraphrase, imitate Butler's rhythm and style.

4. The opening lines of Butler's essay might be understood as an invitation to participate with her in one of the traditions of philosophy. She writes:

What makes for a livable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people in various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers, then that is a conclusion I am happy to embrace. (p. 182)

Stylistically, Butler makes use of questions as a way of enacting philosophical inquiry. As you reread, pay attention to Butler's questions and, through these, to the method and the rhythm of philosophical inquiry. How would you describe the use, placement, and pacing of her questions? How

does one question seem to lead to another? Where do they come from? How do they work together to make an argument?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. The opening lines of Butler's essay might be understood as an invitation to participate with her in one of the traditions of philosophy. She writes:

What makes for a livable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people in various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers, then that is a conclusion I am happy to embrace. It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not. (p. 192)

Write an essay that takes up this invitation — and that takes it up in specific reference to what Butler has offered in “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy.” You will need, then, to take some time to represent her essay — both what it says and what it does. The “Questions for a Second Reading” should be helpful in preparing for this. Imagine an audience of smart people, people who may even know something about Butler but who have not read this essay. You have read it, and you want to give them a sense of how and why you find it interesting and important. But you'll also need to take time to address her questions in your own terms: What makes for a livable world? What constitutes the human? Don't slight this part of your essay. Give yourself as many pages as you gave Butler. You should, however, make it clear that you are writing in response to what you have read. You'll want to indicate, both directly and indirectly, how your thoughts are shaped by, indebted to, or in response to hers.

2. Consider the following passage from Butler's “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy”:

To be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself, and this can have several meanings: to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief. I think that if I can still speak to a “we,” and include myself within its terms, I am speaking to those of us who are living in certain ways *beside ourselves*, whether it is in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage. In a sense, the predicament is to understand what kind of community is composed of those who are beside themselves. (p. 184)

To be *beside oneself* is an idiomatic phrase — which suggests that the meaning of the phrase cannot be determined literally but rather has some figurative connotation. In this sense, for someone not familiar with the idiom, the phrase might even be misleading or misunderstood. Butler takes this idiomatic phrase to its theoretical and social conclusions, thinking carefully about what exactly the figurative expression means to say, what it wants us to say, how it has been used, and how it might be made to serve as a fresh tool for thinking. This is a bold project, and one that takes both a critical eye and creative thought.

We might think of all idiomatic expressions as carrying important social, political, and emotional meanings that, while they might not always be visible on the surface or in everyday conversation, propose a way of thinking: *Blood is thicker than water. I was out of my mind. He is out of touch. She has gone out on a limb. It is all water under the bridge.* For this assignment, write an essay that takes up a particular idiomatic phrase as a tool for thinking through an issue that is important to you. Choose carefully — both the issue and the idiom. There should be an urgency in your writing, as there is in Butler's. And, to locate your essay as a reading of Butler, the urgency should be similarly thoughtful and modulated. You are offering your essay as a response to hers, as a similar exercise in thinking.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. At a key point in her essay, Butler refers to the work of Michel Foucault:

The question of who and what is considered real and true is apparently a question of knowledge. But it is also, as Michel Foucault makes plain, a question of power. Having or bearing “truth” and “reality” is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimulates as ontology. According to Foucault, one of the first tasks of a radical critique is to discern the relation “between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge.” (p. 189)

And she goes on for some length to work with passages from Foucault, although not from his book *Discipline and Punish*. One of its chapters, “Panopticism,” is a selection in *Ways of Reading* (p. 291). Take some time to reread Butler's essay, paying particular attention to her use of Foucault. Where and why is Foucault helpful to her? In what ways is she providing a new argument or a counterargument? And take time to reread “Panopticism.” What passages might be useful in extending or challenging Butler's argument in “Beside Oneself”? Using these two sources, write an essay in which you talk about Butler and Foucault and their engagement with what might be called “radical critique,” an effort (in the terms offered above) to “discern the relation ‘between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge.’”

Note: The assignment limits you to these two sources, the two selections in the textbook. Butler and Foucault have written much, and their work

circulates widely. You are most likely not in a position to speak about everything they have written or about all that has been written about them. We wanted to define a starting point that was manageable. Still, if you want to do more research, you might begin by reading the Foucault essay that Butler cites, "What Is Critique?"; you might go to the library to look through books by Butler and Foucault, choosing one or two that seem to offer themselves as next steps; or you could go to essays written by scholars who, like you, are trying to think about the two together.

2. In his essay "States" (p. 523), Edward Said theorizes about the notion of exile in relation to Palestinian identity, offering a study of exile and dislocation through his analysis of photographs taken by Jean Mohr. Consider the following passage:

We turn ourselves into objects not for sale, but for scrutiny. People ask us, as if looking into an exhibit case, "What is it you Palestinians want?" — as if we can put our demands into a single neat phrase. All of us speak of *awdah*, "return," but do we mean that literally, or do we mean "we must restore ourselves to ourselves"? (p. 542)

When Said talks about being looked at as though in an exhibit case, we might understand him as being concerned with the problem of dehumanization. After all, to be in an exhibit case is to be captured, trapped, or even dead. We might understand Butler as also wrestling with the problem of dehumanization; she writes: "I would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life?" (p. 182).

Write an essay in which you consider the ways Said and Butler might be said to be speaking with each other. How might the condition of exile be like the condition of being *beside oneself*? What kind of connections — whether you see them as productive or problematic, or both at once — can be made between the ways Said talks about nation, identity, and home and the ways Butler talks about gender and sexuality? What passages from each seem to have the other in mind? How does each struggle with reference, with pronouns like *we* and *our*?

3. One might argue that Crucet's "Going Cowboy" (p. 258) is an essay about power — about who has power in what kinds of contexts, about the ways race, gender, and class are linked to power, about the power human beings assert in attempts at describing and/or understanding one another. Of course, Crucet's essay is one of many essays in this book that considers ideas about power as central to their arguments and narratives: Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Gloria Anzaldúa, Susan Griffin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Scaachi Koul, and Edward Said all could be said to be writers with deep concerns about how power is enacted and imagined in contemporary culture.

Butler puts it this way: "to live is to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future" (p. 199). Write an essay in which you consider one or more of the above authors' ideas about power and how those ideas might connect to Cruet's "Going Cowboy." How can the essays you've chosen to discuss shed light upon one another? How might they support, enrich, or undercut one another's arguments? And why do you suppose questions of power are on the mind of these particular authors in their particular moments of composition?



JOY Castro

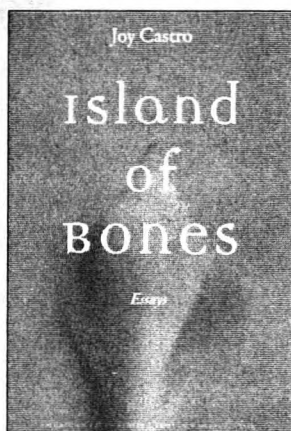
Joy Castro was born in Miami, Florida, in 1967. She writes nonfiction as well as poetry and short fiction. She is currently a full professor at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, where she teaches creative writing and literature in the department of English. Castro has authored two memoirs, *The Truth Book: Escaping a Childhood of Abuse Among Jehovah's Witnesses* (2005) and *Island of Bones* (2012), a collection of essays — two of which we reprint here. Castro has also written two novels, *Hell or High Water* (2012) and *Nearer Home* (2013), and, most recently, a short story collection, *How Winter Began* (2015). She has been a visiting writer at numerous institutions and has given talks, readings, lectures, and workshops across the country. Her writing has won the International Latino Book Award and the Nebraska Book Award, and she has been selected as a finalist for the PEN Center USA Literary Award.

Author Sandra Cisneros writes that “Joy Castro’s writing is like watching an Acapulco cliff diver. It takes my breath away.” Aaron Westerman declares that “there’s nothing even remotely safe about Joy Castro’s writing. You may be emotionally harmed by these stories. You will be changed by them. That’s their purpose. That’s her gift.”

Castro often chooses to reflect on issues that affect her personally and affect all of us culturally and politically, yet she maintains intellectual curiosity and quiet attentiveness in the face of social injustice and outright antagonism. Castro is best

known for her memoir *The Truth Book*. This memoir details her childhood experiences with her abusive stepfather and the church of Jehovah’s Witnesses. In an interview for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, Castro says she has “always been plagued by a tendency toward extreme alertness and openness to sensation, to intensity — to exploring without judgment.” Interviewer Alex Espinoza remarks that “confronting hard truths is something author Joy Castro does especially well.”

The pieces that follow deal with Castro’s experiences as a first-generation college student. Even as she addresses the inadequacies and prejudices of “the academy,” Castro’s passion for education and learning is fully palpable throughout. Her work is imbued with social imperative.



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Hungry

I came to college hungry.

"The kids look like they're in a concentration camp," a mutual friend told our father, who lived in another part of the state and had failed to get custody. During the late years of my childhood, literal starvation had been both a punishment and a way of life, enforced by our abusive Jehovah's Witness stepfather and mother. Gaunt, malnourished, beaten, suffering from the lack of medical and dental care, my brother and I rattled around our classrooms, the school bus, the Kingdom Hall, and no one intervened. At fourteen, I ran away from that trailer, and with the police, the courts, and my father's help, we got my little brother out. For two more years, I lived with my father and his wife, devouring tuna, wheat bread, peanut butter, putting on weight, putting on the clothes they bought for me in bulk at the outlet store, since I'd run away with nothing.

With time, I began to pass for normal. I was the only Latina I knew at my West Virginia high school, but with my pale skin and dark hair and eyes, I looked like just another Italian American, a descendant of those waves of immigrants who'd come to work the mountains' coal mines. Some of my high-school friends went into the mines themselves. Some joined the military. By graduation, many of the girls were engaged.

I came to college hungry for knowledge, for experience.

Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe in evolution, don't participate in politics, don't celebrate any of the myriad Judeo-Christian traditional holidays that brighten most people's lives in the United States: birthdays, Christmas, Chanukah, Easter, Thanksgiving. Intellectually, I was nearly a blank slate, and eager to fill in the gaps, but Jehovah's Witnesses don't believe that college is necessary, and my mother had always forbidden me to dream of it. For me, she envisioned only a good, virginal marriage in the Kingdom Hall and a life of stay-at-home motherhood, of scripture and subservience, of knowing my place and keeping it. In return, I'd be rewarded — eventually — with eternal life on a perfect paradise earth, unburdened by racial injustice, poverty, environmental degradation, or war.

It was the same promise that had lured my Cuban American grandmother away from Catholicism when a Jehovah's Witness climbed the steps of her front porch long ago. A Key West housewife with a seventh-grade education, raising five children and caring for more, my *abuela* chose an idealized vision of this life, this earth — and for her children: peace, justice, and plenty. She died clinging to that dream.

I have not kept my place. Like my mother and grandmother, I chose the earth — but the real earth, complicated and torn, not a post-Armageddon fantasy purveyed by a global religious organization with its own political and financial ends. I chose education, although, growing up, I knew no one who had graduated from college, aside from my schoolteachers and, briefly, my father's lawyer. My parents had only their high school diplomas. None of my relatives and none of my parents' friends had been to college. It was a mysterious, forbidden world, which is perhaps why I wanted it so badly. I chose worldly knowledge and worldly pleasures — and, since my father believed you didn't need a college education, much less graduate school, I did it at my own expense, with generous scholarships, tedious jobs, and enormous loans.

This labor and debt often set me apart from my friends at the groomed green campus of the elite university in Texas that I attended, a school that liked to be called the Harvard of the South and was renowned for golf and tennis — rich people's sports, games I couldn't play. There were no Latina sororities at my university then, and the sororities that did exist seemed stocked with a breed of weird, beautiful aliens. I couldn't relate. I hung out mostly with other scholarship kids, but even they tended to come from comfortable middle-class homes.

When I became pregnant at twenty, the baby's father and I moved into a two-hundred-dollar-a-month apartment in a predominantly Mexican American barrio. My college friends stopped coming around. Most of them who entered my new neighborhood did so only to buy drugs.

But while the area had its problems with crime — the drugs, the wooden houses lit ablaze, the occasional gunshot — there were things about it that I liked. The landlord had my brother's name, and I liked the alleys where women in dusty backyards trimmed their husbands' hair. I liked our sweet neighbors Meiyo and Yoli, finding myself more at ease with them than with my college peers who drove Volvos and Mercedes and went to Vail for spring break. I liked lugging the baby on one hip and the laundry on the other down the rickety wooden stairs and across the street to the open-air laundromat — just a couple of washers and dryers in a guy's carport — and chatting in my battered Spanglish with the other mamas. The crime did scare me, true — but I felt sort of at home.

Yet I felt sort of at home, too, in the seminar rooms at the university, arguing about the politics of texts, or doing research in the library. My mind

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felt like it was finally stretching and working in the way it was born to work. Though my professors did not, in the 1980s, offer courses on Latina/o literature or women's literature or working-class literature, I could still use the skills I learned to analyze the

literature of my own choosing. I rode the bus back and forth between the manicured campus and my shabby street, confused but happy.

Two homes. Sort of. As Latinas in higher education, we don't have to make an either-or choice about what we want or who we will become. We can choose to be both-and. Our challenge is finding and balancing the right ingredients: the ones that nourish us, the ones that taste right.

Today I am a professor with a joint appointment in English and ethnic studies. I teach Latina/o literature, Latina/o studies, women's literature, and creative writing, and I move with comfort and pleasure between my two departments. The student body at the university in Nebraska where I teach is over 90 percent non-Hispanic white, but I'm okay with that. I'm used to it, and I can be useful here, sharing texts, ideas, and perspectives with students who wouldn't otherwise encounter them — and nurturing and mentoring with special pride those Latino and Latina students who do make it through the door. I can help make college a place where they can envision themselves, a place where they, too, can feel at home. I can help recruit them and tell them the truth about the hard parts as well as the rewards.

I went to college at sixteen, hungry for so many things. Now in my forties, I have tasted so much. So much has nourished me. And I am still hungry, still learning.

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On Becoming Educated

In graduate school in the 1990s, I am introduced to a feminist professor of law. We're in a bagel shop. It's sunny. Wiry, with cropped sandy hair and glasses, she looks exactly like my nascent concept of a feminist.

She's working on an article about a little-known provision in the Violence Against Women Act, which President Clinton has just signed into law. The new legislation makes employers responsible for providing workplace protection for women whose partners have threatened them with violence. In the past, violent men had ignored restraining orders to assault and even kill women at their workplaces. This new legislation requires employers, if notified that a targeted woman is in their employ, to provide appropriate security rather than leaving it to the individual woman to defend herself.

I know about men who hurt women.

This is marvelous, I tell the professor. Her article will help protect thousands of women — hundreds of thousands, maybe. I think of my mother, my friend Cindy, my neighbor Diana. Battering happens in every stratum of society, but under the poverty level, domestic violence increases by a factor of five. In the trailer park and barrio and rural towns where I've lived, I've seen my share.

But the professor grimaces and shakes her head. Her article, she explains, is for a law journal, an academic journal. Only other scholars will read it.

But since this new legislative provision isn't widely known, I suggest she could write an article for a mass-market women's magazine, one that will reach millions of woman. Not *Ms.*, which is hard to find, but the kind of magazine available at drugstores and supermarkets, the kind that sits in stacks at inexpensive beauty salons, *Cosmopolitan* or *Redbook*; the kind that reaches ordinary women, women who might be getting beaten. She could save actual women's lives.

Her face wrinkles. That's not the kind of article she writes, she explains with exaggerated patience. Someone else will do that, eventually. A writer who does commercial, popular articles for a general audience.

Her own work, she says, will trickle down.

I take a graduate course in feminist theory. Our professor, educated at one of the world's most prestigious universities, is intimidatingly brilliant in the seminar she runs like a Socratic inquisition one evening a week. I admire her; I like her; I want to be her — but as the semester winds on, my eagerness dissipates because I don't understand Toril Moi or Luce Irigaray or any of the feminists (after Virginia Woolf) whose work we're reading.

I'm a first-generation college student, here by fluke on fellowship, and the theorists' English seems foreign to me, filled with jargon and abstractions at which I can only guess. They say nothing about wife-beating or rape or unequal wages or child molesting, which is the charge that finally got my stepfather sent to prison. They say nothing about being a single mother on ten thousand dollars a year, which is my own situation. The feminist writers respond to male theorists — Lacan, Derrida — whose work I haven't read. I can't parse their sentences or recognize their allusions, and I don't know what they mean or how they're helpful to the strippers and dropouts and waitresses I know, the women I care about the most, to my aunt Lettie who worked the register at Winn-Dixie and my aunt Linda who cleaned houses.

It's true that the complexity and jargon are alluring, like another country, safe and leisured, with a strange, beautiful language that means only abstract things, where a dozen bright young women and their interlocutor can spend three hours conversing around a big table in a comfortable, air-conditioned room that looks like a corporate boardroom in a movie. But I climb the stairs each week in grim frustration.

bell hooks's piece "Out of the Academy and Into the Streets" appears in *Ms.*, and I'm relieved that someone has expressed the inchoate things rumbling inside me. I make photocopies and take it to my professor, asking if we could please read and discuss it in class. She takes the copies and says she'll see.

One evening, our discussion has strayed to Stephen Greenblatt, who, I'll learn later, is the paradigm-shifting Renaissance scholar who initiated New Historicism, a scholarly approach to literary texts. At the time, I know none of this; he's just another male name. I have no context, but the professor and some of the older students seem to have read his work, perhaps in other classes. The professor is intense, lively. She presses her fist to the seminar table. "How do we, as feminist theorists, *respond* to Stephen Greenblatt?"

"What if we don't respond?" I say in frustration. "What if we just keep working on issues that are focused on actual women, issues we actually care about?"

Her eyes are wide. "You can't just *ignore* Stephen Greenblatt," she says. The oldest graduate student, the smart one I admire, shakes her head and smiles faintly.

I disengage. At the end of the term, I write my paper on Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, the only book that was clear to me.

We never do discuss the piece by bell hooks.

In a different class, a graduate seminar on multicultural literature, our professor assigns Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. I enter the seminar room that day with excitement. For the first time in my graduate career, I've encountered a text that speaks passionately to me, a text radical and thrilling, an author whose feminist, ethnic, sexual, and working-class concerns correspond to my own, a book that acknowledges real-world prejudice, poverty, and sexual violation,

that mixes poetry and history, memoir and argument. I have fallen in love. In cursive, I've gushed onto the title page of the black paperback: *The most incredible book I've ever read. It speaks straight to me.*

At last. I can't wait to talk about it.

But the professor, whom I've always admired, opens class by apologizing for having assigned the book at all. He'd included it, he explains, only because he'd heard it was important. But if he'd read it first, he would never have put it on the syllabus: it was too disjointed, too polemical. Students quickly chime in with their discomfort over the book's "angry" content.

I'm confused. My professor and classmates hadn't stumbled over W. E. B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, or Maxine Hong Kingston, but Gloria Anzaldúa is somehow too different, too much.

It's the anger in the text, I learn, that bothers them. "She's so *angry*," they keep saying. For the whole session, I find myself arguing in defense of the book's worth, trying to articulate the difference between being angry by temperament and expressing justified anger in response to violation.

The experience is both alienating and illuminating. *Did you think we weren't angry?*

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Maybe if you're a distinguished professor of law, the notion of your name next to a piece in *Cosmo* makes you cringe. Maybe if your educational pedigree is immaculate, the remedial intellectual needs of people who grew up with food stamps aren't your problem. Maybe if you're a well-meaning professor teaching ethnic literature, Anzaldúa's anger is the only thing visible. Maybe you can't feel the burn of every injustice she inherited and lived, much less appreciate the elegance of her complex aesthetic.

At the time, I didn't realize that these small incidents were negotiations of power, contests over whose perspective mattered and whose voices would be permitted and welcomed at the table. At the institution where I did my graduate work in the 1990s, Third World feminism, women-of-color feminism, and transnational feminism hadn't yet trickled down.

After earning a doctorate, I was hired by a small men's college in rural Indiana. At Wabash, which prided itself on its maintenance of tradition, men comprised not only the entire student body but also most of the faculty and almost the whole administrative structure.

Students asked, while I was sitting at my desk in my office, whose secretary I was. Alumni at luncheons asked what a "purty young thing"

like me was doing there. All-campus emails by drunk freshmen asked for the best place on campus to beat their meat.

I taught there for ten years, the only tenure-line woman in my department for the first nine. I earned tenure; I chaired my department. We hired more women.

I also got to teach women's literature, including Latina literature, and feminist theory to classrooms of thirty-five men at a time. Farm-boys and lawyers' sons took my classes. Some came with the expressed intention of debunking feminism. Some wanted to know, when we read the novels of Jean Rhys, why we had to read a book by a slut. Some questioned women's right to vote. Yes. When I taught Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*, I was under no illusion that its insights would be met with joy.

I value those voices, those questions, that red-state hostility, because they taught me how to make feminism's insights relevant to people outside a closed, snug room of agreement. I learned how to make feminist theory, critical race theory, and observations about class privilege relevant, exciting, and even needful to people who had no material reason to care. I learned diplomacy. I learned not to back down.

As academics, we can forget the urgency and hunger people have for the knowledge we hold. We can forget that even those who claim to be hostile may need what we offer to help them make sense of a complicated world.

Academics don't share a monolithic experience. Many of us are adjuncts or lecturers, forced to piece together work with few benefits and little security, while the fortunate percentage of us with tenure-track positions have to hustle to build our vitas and merit files as our institutions require. Either way, the thick busyness of our lives can induce a sweet, privileged forgetfulness, a smug sense of how worthwhile our work of "knowledge production" is. Over the years, I've known many dedicated and creative teachers, eager to reach and engage every student, yet I've also known academics who view students as an obstacle to their real work of research or see teaching as a process of simply culling the best from the herd.

But I speak now as one of that herd. The herd is made up of smart, desperate, and intellectually eager individuals — if they are met halfway, if they are spoken to with respect and in language they can understand. They have not been to Harvard, and if we make them feel stupid, inadequate, and ashamed for not knowing its vocabularies and sharing its assumptions, they will retreat. (My brother, living in a trailer with friends and putting himself through college, dropped out after a year.) If our concerns seem too abstract, effete, and irrelevant, they will turn away in disgust.

Yet we need them. Their voices are vital. The academy — as we fondly, misguidedly call it, as if it were some great, unified thing — is lumbering along amid eviscerating budget cuts, pressures to corporatize, to streamline, to justify its existence to hostile anti-intellectual factions and a

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skeptical public, to become purely instrumental, a machine that grants job credentials to twenty-two-year-olds so they can get on with their lives. In

the face of such intense and varied pressures, the academy must find ways to preserve itself as a place for thought to flourish — yet *everyone* needs to be invited to think. The discussion has to matter to everyone, and everyone's voice must be heard.

Last spring, my son graduated from Oberlin College, and in only a few more months, I'll have paid off my own

enormous student loans. That is, I believe deeply in the intellectual benefits of higher education and have willingly indentured myself to attain them. On the other hand, I loathe the academy's blind spots.

A few years ago, Stephen Greenblatt — *the* Stephen Greenblatt — said in an interview, "I've been at this for 40 years. And, as an academic, I've been content with relatively small audiences, with the thought that the audience I long for will find its way eventually to what I have written, provided that what I have written is good enough."

On the one hand, there's a lovely quiet confidence in the long view Greenblatt takes, a modest surety of purpose, but it's also a position freighted with an absence of urgency. That unacknowledged absence is a luxury, a privilege, that too many academics ignore, not at their own peril, but at the peril of others, others like the women who would have been very grateful to learn about that provision in the Violence Against Women Act about employers' responsibilities to protect them. "The audience I long for will find its way eventually to what I have written," Greenblatt writes. *Eventually*. There's no rush. And the burden of finding knowledge, you'll note, is on the audience. Seeking the audience out is not configured as the thinker's job. *Eventually, if I am superb enough, the chosen few will manage to discover my work.*

Sitting on my sofa on a Saturday morning, writing, it still surprises and honors me that an editor has asked me to write an essay for a prestigious college's online journal. I was raised to be seen and not heard. Now someone wants my voice?

That's the key, I think: to remain surprised, to remain honored. Our public voices are an extraordinary privilege. We can make the choice to carry with us and be shaped by the voices we've heard — the strippers and dropouts and battered mothers — and we can act so that what we do will matter to them. We can continue to choose — no matter what islands of remove our positions may afford us — to keep inviting those voices: to teach free classes to the poor, for example, and to listen to what the poor tell us when they read our cherished texts. We can teach texts written by poor women in our classrooms. We can remember that torture and abuse

traumatize humans into silence, and that humiliation and subordination train people into reticence, but that their voices, those valuable voices, can be fished to the surface again, if we are patient, if we are kind. If we care.

In graduate school, professors said you had to choose one thing or the other: you could be a creative writer or a scholar, not both. The creative writing professors said you had to choose a genre: poetry or fiction, not both. You could be a feminist professor in a classroom or a feminist activist on the streets, not both.

It was all too reminiscent of the old divisions long demanded of us: you must think or feel, not both. You must be a mind or a body, not both. You can be pretty or smart, not both. You can have a family or a career. Why did intellectuals in the 1990s continue to invest in such reductive binaries? Why the urge to bifurcate, to build retaining walls between the multiple truths of our experience?

They were wrong. It isn't necessary. Today we publish scholarship and creative work. We write for general audiences and trained specialists in our field. We publish in glossy magazines, and the local newspaper, and academic journals; we publish scholarly articles, and poetry, and fiction, and memoir.

For me, all of feminism's waves and permutations — as well as the voices that contest it — are essential. All of our varied feminisms seek a more just world, and there's no need to limit our efforts to particular spheres, no need to cut ties with parts of ourselves. While I serve on the advisory board of a university press with other professors, vetting scholarly projects for publication, I also serve as a mentor to a Latina-Lakota teenager whose mother, a meth addict, lost custody.

She lives with her father, stepmother, and two brothers in their small mobile home in a trailer park. When I drive to see her, it feels like I am driving into my own past.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. In both of these short essays, Castro troubles many binary understandings of the world, particularly the understanding of the university (or the "academy") and the world(s) "outside" the academy. Reread Castro's essays and underline passages that would appear to you to fit a definition you have of *academic*. What are the markers of "academic" prose as you understand it? Additionally, which passages seem to resist rather than adhere to conventions of academic writing? What writerly moves does Castro make that either conform to or resist what you have come to think of as writing that belongs in "the academy"?
2. Castro mentions quite a few writers in her work: Toril Moi, Luce Irigaray, bell hooks, Stephen Greenblatt, Jean Rhys, Zora Neale Hurston, and others. As you look back at Castro's references to these authors, what can you tell

about them from the context of Castro's essays? Once you have found a few examples, go online and find out about a few of these authors. It is likely you will even be able to find examples of their writing. How does reading these authors' work or reading about them help you further understand the specific moments of Castro's essays or her essays as a whole?

3. Alex Espinoza has said that "confronting hard truths is something author Joy Castro does especially well." As you read Castro's essays again, what do you identify as the "hard truths" in this work? What signals to you that the truth you are noticing is "hard" either for Castro or for all of us? And how would you describe the way that Castro "confronts" these hard truths?
4. What is remarkable about Castro's work here is how many subjects she attends to quite carefully in such a short amount of space. Gather a few fellow readers together and make a list of as many things as you can think of that these essays seem to be about. What subjects does Castro bring up? How does she manage to address so many subjects in so few pages?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. One way to read Castro's pieces is to see them as narrative, as two short essays that tell the stories of Castro's journey as a student and educator. But another way to understand Castro's writing is to imagine these essays as making an argument (or several arguments) about many different things: education, race, class, higher education, social justice, gender, and any other subjects you might have thought of while you considered the fourth "Question for a Second Reading."

Write an essay in which you make an argument about what the most urgent argument of Castro's essays seems to be. Of course, she makes more than one argument. But for the essay you will write, try to prioritize. What is her central argument? Or which of her arguments are most central to you? Why? How can you tell? What passages would you point to in order to support your own argument about what is most important in Castro's work? What is Castro's work *really* about in this selection?

2. Castro has a very lively online presence — a website, an active Twitter account, many online publications, interviews, and book reviews. Spend some time reading from these many sources — read at least one book review of *Island of Bones* (the book you read excerpts from here), one interview with Castro, and whatever other kinds of materials about Castro or her work you can find.

Write an essay in which you consider the following: What does your research help you see? How does reading what Castro has said about her own work, or what others have said about it, transform or affirm your initial reading of these essays? You might then make a move to talk more

conceptually about reading — about *how* we read, and how it changes our reading to learn more about a writer or his or her other work. What kind of enterprise is reading? How does the movement between these printed essays and your online reading enrich your reading of Castro? Imagine that after your online research, you were able to create hyperlinks or footnotes in Castro's essays: what kinds of interventions would you make to help other readers read more closely and more richly?

3. Castro's essays, in two places, refer to the concept of "trickling down." You might be most familiar with this term from the study of economics, if you have ever taken such a course. If you have not taken such a course, some online reading will help you get a sense of what this means. Once you feel like you have a handle on the history and meaning of "trickle-down economics," look carefully at the places in the essay where Castro refers to "trickling down." Write an essay in which you consider why Castro might pay attention to this term. How does it come up in the essay the first time? How does it come up the second time? How might this notion of "trickling down" be a part of Castro's larger critiques and arguments? Why do you think Castro might want us to pay attention to such a concept?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. We might read both Joy Castro's work and Susan Griffin's "Our Secret" (p. 351) as containing elements of autobiography. Each writer relies on stories from her own life to demonstrate the relationship between one individual life and the larger cultural and political implications. Griffin writes, "To a certain kind of mind, what is hidden away ceases to exist" (p. 374). As readers, we are struck by the ways this statement (and so many of Griffin's statements) pertains both to her own life story and to the larger historical narrative of the Holocaust.

Reread both Castro and Griffin, looking for sentences and phrases that seem to work on two levels (the personal and the political/cultural). Which sentences or phrases suggest to you that they are both about the writer's life *and* about all of our lives, about the world? How can you tell?

Write an essay in which you illuminate, through the work of these two writers, the relationship between one life and what happens in the world at large. How do these writers help us understand ourselves as individuals and also as parts of larger systems, cultures, or worlds?

3. Joy Castro writes about her experience with discussing Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands / La Frontera* (from which the essay "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" is excerpted; see p. 22) as both a student and a teacher. Castro writes, "I find myself arguing in defense of the book's worth, trying to articulate the difference between being angry by temperament and expressing justified anger in response to violation" (p. 212). Both Anzaldúa and Castro

are writers and both are scholars, academics who have developed theories and philosophies about education, class, culture, race, language, and identity.

Write an essay in which you talk about the relationship between Castro's essays and Anzaldúa's essay. To give yourself a starting point, you might begin with what Castro directly says about Anzaldúa. But your job is to imagine these two texts as having a conversation. What are their common threads? How can Anzaldúa's essay illuminate Castro's essays, which were written twenty-five years later? How would you describe each writer's relationship to anger? What are Castro and Anzaldúa angry about? How can you tell? And, finally, what is your response? Given Castro's critique of readers who are bothered by "the anger in the text," what would you say to those readers? How do you understand the relationship between writing, identity, social justice, and emotion?

JEFF Chang

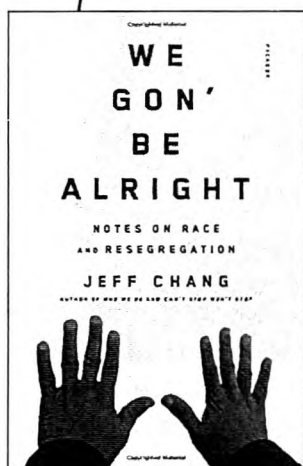


Jeff Chang

Jeff Chang (b. 1950) is a prolific journalist and writer whose work focuses on music and the arts, and also addresses issues of identity and race. He served as the Executive Director of the Institute for Diversity in the Arts + Committee on Black Performing Arts at Stanford University, before leaving in 2018 to become the Vice President of Narrative, Arts, and Culture at Race Forward. His first book, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005), earned the American Book Award and the Asian American Literary Award. His second book, *Who We Be: A Cultural History of Race in Post-Civil Rights America* (2014), won the Ray + Pat Browne Award for Best Work in Popular Culture and American Culture. Chang's most recent book of essays, *We Gon' Be Alright: Notes on Race and Resegregation* (2016), from which the following selection is drawn, was heralded by the *Washington Post* as "the smartest book of the year." His earlier works "describe the cultural movements inspired by young people of color, the so-called hip-hop generation" while *We Gon' Be Alright* "takes a look at recent tragedies and protests that speak to race," linking current movements on social media and beyond to historical movements such as the Great Migration.

Chang's works call on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, groups he describes as "in between black and white . . . complicity and freedom," to get involved, to take up conversations of race and violence, to "get off the fence, to declare which side we are on, and to join the side of justice not just for the few but for all." The title of Chang's book of essays comes from the Pulitzer Prize winning rapper Kendrick Lamar. Lamar's song "Alright" includes lyrics with lengthy descriptions of struggle, terror, and violence, and is buoyed only by the reassuring refrain, "We gon' be alright," a phrase Chang returns to throughout his essay collection.

In the chapter that follows, "Is Diversity for White People?" Chang makes it clear that he comes from a position in favor of diversity. Yet, as he does with so much of his writing, Chang aims to examine more carefully and critically a term that has become a catch-all whose meaning, despite its importance, has lost its way in our language. He elaborates, "I think what's happened is



that we've been content to sort of satisfy ourselves with the picture of diversity. The picture of diversity substitutes for the push for equity," before asking, "Is diversity the type of thing that makes white people feel good?" Chang's invitational writing style softens the challenging nature of the topics he tackles. His questions are not confrontational, but conversational, affirming the urgency of his subject matter as he entreats the reader, saying, *these are things we must discuss*.

Is Diversity for White People?

In December 2015, Donald Trump held a noon rally at an airport hangar in Mesa, Arizona, a largely white suburb in the Phoenix sprawl that had been the spawning ground for the viciously anti-immigrant law S.B. 1070.

Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, taking a break from defending himself from Department of Justice charges that he had violated a federal court order against racial profiling, kept the stage warm. "You're the patriots," he told the audience. They were the ones worth protecting — with Arpaio's men and guns and jails, and with Trump's grand border wall. The sheriff continued, "One thing about him, I think he'll really do what he says. I really do." The placards that had been distributed read, "The Silent Majority Stands with Trump." In the state of Barry Goldwater, Trump was putting on a display of firepower and nostalgia.

Trump made his grand entrance. His Boeing 757, emblazoned with his name in bold on the side, rolled to a stop in front of the hangar and a crowd of several thousand. From the top of the gangway he waved, then descended the stairs to Twisted Sister's mid-eighties hair-metal hit "We're Not Gonna Take It."

First, he did a live interview with Bill O'Reilly. Large American and Arizonan flags and the enormous crowd served as his backdrop. O'Reilly began questioning Trump almost apologetically, as if recognizing that he had wandered onto hostile turf. When Trump dissed Fox News for "saying untrue things about me" and blustered that he would do "pretty severe stuff" to stop terrorism, the crowd roared.

O'Reilly asked, "Are you gonna tell me tonight on this program that you don't say stuff just to get at the emotion of the voter? I know you do."

"I'm telling you right now that I don't. I do the right thing. I bring up subjects that are important. I bring up illegal immigration," Trump said. "And if I didn't bring it up you wouldn't even be talking about illegal immigration." The crowd started chanting his name.

O'Reilly persisted. "You don't do this to whip up the base, whip up your crowd?"

"I don't, I don't," Trump said. "I say what's right, I say what's on my mind, and that's what's happening."

After the interview he stepped up to the podium to deliver a long speech in his churlish, digressive style, dispensing ample insults to his many enemies. "Somebody said, 'Oh, Trump's a great entertainer.' That's a lot of bullshit, I'll tell you," he said. "We have a message, we have a message, and the message is we don't want to let other people take advantage of us."¹

In his best seller *The Art of the Deal*, Trump's advice was to "know your market" and "use your leverage." Trump knew his market. He understood the inchoate white anger cohering in the country well ahead of Republican party leaders and media elites. "Leverage," Trump wrote, "is having something the other guy wants. Or better yet, needs. Or best of all, simply can't do without."²

In 2011, Obama, who had become for disaffected whites the image of all fears, provided Trump with leverage. Trump made himself the public face of the bizarre Birther movement, which held that Barack Obama had not been born in the United States. In naming Obama an "illegal alien," conspiracists could attach fantastical narratives to Obama: Chicago criminal corruption, Muslim takeovers, Mexican drug-dealer invasions.

Despite the fact that Obama had already released a short-form certification of live birth, Trump sent investigators to Hawai'i to uncover what he called "one of the greatest cons in the history of politics and beyond." Obama responded by releasing a long-form version of his birth certificate. Outplayed, Trump still declared victory, saying, "I am so proud of myself because I've accomplished something that nobody else was able to accomplish." He had forced the first Black president to become the first standing president in history forced to defend the legitimacy of his birth-right. And he had captured the attention and the affection of frustrated white voters. But at that moment Trump retreated, quietly walking away from a presidential bid. The time had not yet come.

By 2015, though, it had. Whites undone by skyrocketing economic inequality, distrustful of big business and media, ignored by elites — the middle and working class, whose fears of falling were being realized — needed someone to vocalize their anger and anxiety. Trump found ready scapegoats. He called Mexican immigrants "criminals" and "rapists," warned that "Islam hates us," and accused China of "waging economic war against us." He pandered to whites' fragility, played on their glory-days nostalgia. His ham-fisted "Make America Great Again" slogan — so prosaic and dull next to Reagan's "Morning in America" — seemed designed for bro-style fist-pumping, not gauzy restorationist dreaming. As one supporter put it: "Trump is a winner and I'm sick of losing."³

His candidacy wreaked havoc on the Republican primaries. The party had become calcified with rules, protocols, etiquette. Trump descended from the air and the airwaves to talk shit. He entertained. He created the vibe that he was a billionaire you could share a hot dog and a can of Coors with, even though deep down you knew he never would. You went to Trump; he never came to you. It created a desire, a longing. And so even as Trump kept an army of fact-checkers well employed — fully 77 percent of the Trump statements that PolitiFact had investigated were rated "Mostly False," "False," or "Pants on Fire!" — the last thing his supporters cared about was the facts. They had feelings, and no one else understood them like Trump did.

One supporter told Ryan Lizza of the *New Yorker*, "The birth certificate stuff, I loved. I watched all the YouTube videos on it, and what he was

saying made sense." She added, "I'm dead set [on voting for him] unless I find out something down the line. But I'm not going to believe what the media tells me. I have to hear it from him. The media does not persuade me one bit."⁴

For Trump diehards in a time of danger and disjunction, the media's job was not to challenge, but to affirm. So when demonstrators poured into the streets to protest police killings of Blacks, the media was supposed to confirm for them that those chaos makers were actually supporting the killing of cops, that somehow the Movement for Black Lives was a Black version of the Ku Klux Klan. And some pundits — Hannity, the same O'Reilly who confronted Trump — dutifully filled this role.⁵ In their telling, "Black lives matter" was not a call to end state violence against Blacks — and in that way, to end state violence against all — it was evidence of hatred against whites, a premonition of racial apocalypse.

White liberal media recoiled. To them, Trump supporters were unseemly, irrational, embarrassing. They looked for an explanation and, by the end of 2015, found it in Angus Deaton and Anne Case's scholarship on the rising rates of white suicide, drug overdose, and premature death. Deaton and Case had helped white liberal media rediscover the steeply declining white middle and working class.

It was not a little ironic that the Movement for Black Lives had opened up a fresh discussion about white mortality. When the conversation in this country is about race, all too often it leads

back to whiteness. But as Alicia Garza, one of the founders of Black Lives Matter, has written, "When Black people get free, everyone gets free."⁶ Inequality impacts us unequally. The truth is that we cannot address it without starting from the bottom. But fear is the

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enemy of truth and division the master key of demagogues. Democracy was just another hustle for Trump, one that he could play best in the scrum of the popular culture, where his skill with the levers of the media was unparalleled. Race would be his shortcut to attention and conversion, and he could figure out the details of the game later.

What Trump understood best was how banal facts could be marshaled to unleash hysterical exigency. After the breakthrough civil rights victories of the early 1960s, it was commonplace to note that each generation was the most diverse in the nation's history. Objectively, the data projected that whites would drop below 50 percent of the national population within a generation. But to Trump voters, coastal pundits and paid experts did not understand what that really meant. Change meant erasure.

Racial apocalypse is the recurring white American narrative in which the civilizers, the chosen people meant to fulfill their destiny, are overrun by the savages, the barbarians who embody chaos and ruin. It's in the stories told about the Alamo, General Custer, Reconstruction, the

sixties. It's even there in the fixation on the Civil War, Lincoln's life and assassination, and the common disappearance of slavery from that story. The racial apocalypse is part of the DNA of American pop culture — Buffalo Bill Cody's cowboys-and-Indians show, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* — but instead of bloodshed and death, we got happy endings. The end of whiteness is one of the oldest, most common stories Americans tell to scare ourselves (even though we don't all scare equally).

So in the Southern heat of 2009, Tea Party activists appeared under Confederate flags bearing signs that read, "Bring Back 'We the People.'" Trump's Birther campaign followed. And by 2015, Trump voters were flipping off everyone who argued that diversity was inevitable — the grabby minorities, their liberal-media apologists, the corrupt Republican party elite — retorting, "Not over me."

When Black Lives Matter and DREAM activists began to demonstrate at Trump rallies, violence erupted. In Birmingham, Alabama, Trump supporters tackled, punched, and kicked a Black protester. In Las Vegas, another Black protester was dragged out of a Trump rally as supporters shouted, "Kick his ass," "Light the motherfucker on fire," "Sieg Heil," and "He's a Muslim guy!" Tensions climaxed in Chicago, as hundreds of demonstrators and supporters clashed in the University of Illinois arena, forcing Trump to cancel his rally at the last minute.

After two brothers in Boston attacked a homeless Latino man with a pipe and then pissed on him, shouting, "Donald Trump was right, all these illegals need to be deported," Trump tweeted that he "would never condone violence." But he also said, "I will say, the people that are following me are passionate. They love this country, they want this country to be great again."⁷ At times, he seemed delighted by the aggressive physicality of his supporters. After demonstrators interrupted his Vegas rally, he told supporters, "We should have been doing what they're doing for the last seven years because what's happening to our country is a disgrace."⁸ No one had any doubt about whom Trump meant when he said "we," "they," and "our."

A few days later, as security at an Oklahoma City rally surrounded a young protester, Trump said, "You see, in the good old days, law enforcement acted a lot quicker than this. But today everyone is so politically correct. Our country is going to hell — we're being politically correct."

He concluded, "We are really becoming a frightened country, and it's very, very sad."

THE PICTURE OF DIVERSITY

On an April morning before the New York primary, a group calling itself the National Diversity Coalition for Trump called media to an event at Trump Tower. They intended to demonstrate that their man had broad support from communities of color.

The event did not go well. Organizers — including *The Apprentice* star Omarosa Manigault, a gaggle of Black pastors, as well as members of

Arab Americans for Trump, Muslim Americans for Trump, and Hispanic Patriots for Trump — did not know when Trump would speak. When he did arrive, he talked for less than five minutes, never addressed his campaign's diversity efforts, then disappeared back into the elevator. "What was billed as a press conference seemed more of a photo op and dash," NBC News's Ali Vitali wrote.⁹ The Diversity Coalition stood around wondering if the meeting they hoped to have with Trump was still happening.

This tale of Trump's sad little Coalition tells us as much about the story of diversity now as Trump's race-baiting and countenancing of violence do. It's about the ways diversity has been exploited and rendered meaningless in a time when change is thought of in terms of numbers, appraisals, and images.

"IT'S ABOUT THE WAYS DIVERSITY HAS BEEN EXPLOITED AND RENDERED MEANINGLESS IN A TIME WHEN CHANGE IS THOUGHT OF IN TERMS OF NUMBERS, APPRAISALS, AND IMAGES".

In early 2000, the University of Wisconsin began preparing its admissions application to send out to prospective undergrads. The proposed cover featured a photo of its student body at a home football game cheering on their team. There was only one problem, which the African American vice chancellor quickly pointed out to the admissions director: the photo featured only white students.

The staff spent the summer looking for photos that might show happy students in Badger red being diverse together. (At the time, the university was 90 percent white.) They could not find one they deemed suitable. Instead the staff found a photo of a broadly smiling Black male student, and cut-and-pasted his head into the picture behind two exuberant white women. Over 100,000 applications were printed and sent out.¹⁰

One day, that Black student walked into the admissions office. His name was Diallo Shabazz and he was known on campus as an excellent scholar who worked under the vice chancellor to tutor inner-city teens of color in precollege summer programs. An admissions counselor stopped him to tell him he was on the cover of the application. Shabazz stared at the photo. He had never been to a football game.

Soon the story had become a minor national controversy. Some argued that the doctored photo represented the "intellectual dishonesty of racial-preference programs," as if the floating signifier of Shabazz's digitized head were somehow a threat to American meritocracy. But many more wondered about the university's institutional goals. Whom was the image meant to attract? Students of color, who had long been underrepresented at the University of Wisconsin? Or white students and parents who could be assured that the campus was indeed elite and non-racist? Was diversity for everybody, for people of color, or just for white people?

In the coming decade, urban neighborhoods would be marketed for their "diversity," corporations and colleges would appoint chief diversity officers and increase their holdings of assets directed at "diverse demographics," while pushing ads — sometimes also doctored — that featured

happy, diverse consumers. The college-admissions industrial complex began using diversity in its rankings criteria, even as the courts continued to chip away at and voters dismantled the affirmative action programs that many whites disliked.

During the 1980s, campuses like the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Michigan tied together notions of diversity and excellence. At the time the link was startling for some. But by the turn of the millennium, diversity and excellence — or perhaps, more specifically, the appearance of each — were bound together. The appearance of diversity signaled excellence, and the appearance of excellence signaled diversity.

The scholar Nancy Leong named this new arrangement “racial capitalism.” She argued that white individuals and predominantly white institutions derived “social or economic value from associating with individuals with nonwhite racial identities.” She wrote that “in a society preoccupied with diversity, nonwhiteness is a valued commodity. And where that society is founded on capitalism, it is unsurprising that the commodity of nonwhiteness is exploited for its market value.”¹¹

Remember the strange case of Rachel Dolezal, the woman who was born white, sued Howard University for discriminating against her in part because she was white, but then went on to lead the Spokane NAACP as a “Black-identifying” woman?¹² Or perhaps the story of Michael Derrick Hudson, a white poet who wrote under the name of a high school classmate, Yi-Fen Chou, in an attempt to have his writing recognized by diversity-minded judges? Both seemed extreme examples of racial capitalism — whites who valued diversity so much that they decided to fake it.

Anna Holmes writes that the value of diversity extends to “moral credibility,” an idea that captures individualized dimensions of white fragility and points directly to the ethics of white agency. In Dolezal’s case, what began as fakery developed into an ultimately failed act of passing, with its complicated, combustible brew of identification, appropriation, and displacement. Hudson, for his part, believed that masking himself in diversity might confer on him relevance and gravitas. If Dolezal felt responsibility for her adopted siblings and her biracial children, Hudson understood that diversity could really be just about optics. These were stories — to borrow the title of Eric Lott’s famous book on blackface minstrelsy — of love and theft.

When Shabazz and other Black students at the University of Wisconsin learned of the Photoshop fiasco, they were bemused and befuddled. “The admissions department that we’ve been talking about, I believe, was on the fourth floor, and the multicultural center was on the second floor of the same building,” Shabazz recalled later to National Public Radio. “So you didn’t need to create false diversity in the picture — all you really needed to do was go downstairs.”¹³ Or upstairs. The Black Student Union’s president, Jana Thompson, told reporters that their office was one floor up from the admissions department, and that she could have given them photos if they had asked.

The original photo of Shabazz featured him sitting among a crowd of white students. He was the focus of the photo, and all the white faces in the frame were turned away or cut off. It makes one wonder: Couldn’t

university administrators have deployed this picture in their application materials? Or did they think it more suitable to paste a Black face into a photo in which whites were centered? What was the minimum threshold of color necessary for an acceptable presentation of diversity? The University of Wisconsin remained an institution whose student body was only 2 percent Black. Diversity imparted value, and it was still a much lower standard than equity.

Diallo Shabazz sued the University of Wisconsin. Not for an apology, but for what he called a “budgetary apology” — reparations, if you will. And he won. The university earmarked \$10 million for the recruitment of students of color and the implementation of diversity initiatives. Lisa Wade, one of Shabazz’s teachers, wrote the coda: “The irony in the whole thing is that UW requested photos of Shabazz shaking administrators’ hands in reconciliation (i.e., photographic proof that everything was just fine).”¹⁴ In the digital stream of images flowing from the story, administrators hoped the last would be one that restored the impression of the University of Wisconsin as an excellent, diverse school.

MORE THAN FREEDOM

The official use of the word “diversity” reveals a story of compromise and redirection. The word itself was a semiobscure one, favored by an esoteric group of ecologists and cultural equity activists, until Justice Lewis Powell Jr. plucked it out to use in his opinion in the 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case. For better and for worse, Powell profoundly changed how we talk about race in America. Because of that case, “diversity” has been inextricably entwined with another weird phrase: “affirmative action.”

For a long time, the debate over affirmative action was a proxy for discussing race and inequality. It was a way to talk about debt and reparations, guilt and transformation, without ever using those words. With each succeeding Supreme Court case, it seems that philosophy, pragmatism, and policy receive diminishing returns.

As Terry H. Anderson writes in his history *The Pursuit of Fairness*, the word “affirmative” and the word “action” may have first appeared together in the 1935 Wagner Act, also known as the National Labor Relations Act, the law that guaranteed collective bargaining rights for private-sector laborers. The term was associated with a different kind of inequality back then, as a remedy for workers who had been discriminated against — offending employers were required to take “affirmative action” to restore the salary or position the employee would otherwise have had.¹⁵ The term did not explicitly speak to racial discrimination. It created more broadly the notion of a class in need of protection for whom equity needed to be restored or achieved. Anderson and other historians, notably Ira Katznelson, have argued that government efforts — such as New Deal policies around housing, welfare, Social Security, Medicaid, and labor, or the postwar G.I. Bill — were effectively affirmative action programs for protected classes composed predominantly of whites.¹⁶

By the 1960s, during a period of an emerging civil rights consensus, African Americans and other underrepresented minorities who had suffered discrimination were finally deemed worthy of consideration as a protected class. Through a series of executive orders issued first by President Kennedy and then by President Johnson, and later in the 1964 Civil Rights Act (which enjoyed the support of 70 percent of the country), the government response to racial justice movements took shape, first through a colorblind principle of nondiscrimination and then in the use of affirmative action as a color-conscious weapon to reverse racial discrimination and segregation.¹⁷

In a June 4, 1965, commencement speech at Howard University, President Johnson articulated the shift:

But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: "Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please."

You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.

This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

For the task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities — physical, mental and spiritual — and to pursue their individual happiness.¹⁸

Beginning in the early 1960s, elite universities — including Michigan, Harvard, Cornell, and UCLA, all historically white institutions whose student-of-color populations were negligibly small — adopted affirmative action programs.¹⁹ At many of these campuses, students of color demanded proportional representation, but administrators opted for more gradualist programs, taking on the governmental language of analysis, goals, and timetables.²⁰

Over the next three decades, educational, governmental, and corporate institutions across the country developed and expanded affirmative action plans to open doors for Blacks and other minorities. The broad-based civil rights movement became a battle waged largely by politicians, lawyers, administrators, and academics focused on claims of rights and opportunity.

In 1978, the *Bakke* decision crystallized debates that had been raging since the outset of affirmative action. And it did so in the context of California, a key demographic forerunner of the rest of the nation.

At the time, California's population was over 25 percent nonwhite. Plaintiff Allan Bakke wanted to attend the University of California at Davis medical program, which reserved sixteen of its one hundred slots

annually for disadvantaged students via a special admissions program. Twice, the med school rejected Bakke. The California Supreme Court ruled six to one that the special admissions program was a quota system and was unconstitutional. It also held that any consideration of race in admissions was unconstitutional.

In a 1977 op-ed titled "Reparation, American Style," the *New York Times* framed the question before the court like so: "Should we reduce opportunity for whites — somewhat — so as to accelerate opportunity for some blacks and other victims of pervasive discrimination?"²¹ To supporters of affirmative action, Bakke's victory denied the history of racial discrimination and segregation, the fact of underrepresentation, and preserved white entitlement. But to opponents, Bakke's case defined "reverse racism" against whites.

The U.S. Supreme Court split down the middle. Four justices — Chief Justice Burger, along with Justices Stevens, Rehnquist, and Stewart — agreed with the California Supreme Court. Four — Brennan, White, Marshall, and Blackmun — supported the affirmative action program. In order to secure a majority, Justice Lewis Powell Jr. proposed to cut the baby in half, finding the special admissions program unconstitutional but allowing that the university — and, in turn, the government — had a compelling interest in seeking diversity.

Powell first argued that fidelity to colorblindness all but denied any consideration of previous discrimination based on race. "Racial and ethnic distinctions of any sort are inherently suspect and thus call for the most exacting judicial examination," he wrote. But race, along with other kinds of factors — such as geography or "cultural disadvantage" — enriched the educational experience for all. Such "plus factors" together constituted "genuine diversity."

Powell drew extensively — and quite unironically — on Harvard's admissions plan, writing:

The belief that diversity adds an essential ingredient to the educational process has long been a tenet of Harvard College admissions. Fifteen or twenty years ago, however, diversity meant students from California, New York, and Massachusetts; city dwellers and farm boys; violinists, painters and football players; biologists, historians and classicists; potential stock-brokers, academics and politicians. *The result was that very few ethnic or racial minorities attended Harvard College.* In recent years Harvard College has expanded the concept of diversity to include students from disadvantaged economic, racial and ethnic groups. Harvard College now recruits not only Californians or Louisianans but also blacks and Chicanos and other minority students. Contemporary conditions in the United States mean that if Harvard College is to continue to offer a first-rate education to its students, minority representation in the under-graduate body cannot be ignored by the Committee on Admissions.²²

Powell had disappeared racial exclusion from the history of higher education, and redirected discussion of affirmative action into a decontextualized present. He radically flattened difference. *You're a farm*

boy. You're a violinist. You're a Louisianan. You're Black. You're Chicano. He had affirmed that diversity really was for white people.

By contrast, Justice Blackmun noted that only 2 percent of doctors in the country were of color, and wondered why, of all admissions preferences, the one remedying racial discrimination should be singled out for condemnation. He added, "I suspect it would be impossible to arrange an affirmative-action program in a racially neutral way and have it successful. To ask that this be so is to demand the impossible."

Justice Thurgood Marshall was even more direct. "It is more than a little ironic that, after several hundred years of class-based discrimination against Negroes, the Court is unwilling to hold that a class-based remedy for that discrimination is permissible." But with Powell's decision, diversity displaced equity as the only viable defense of programs meant to address underrepresentation.

In 1979, just after the Bakke case was decided, 67 percent of whites supported affirmative action.²³ But Powell had opened the door for opponents to attack the program as harmful to whites. To achieve diversity, he seemed to argue, you didn't need quotas, you just needed optics. Powell's diversity rationale countenanced a Noah's Ark approach — add two of each to the Ark to escape the rising floodwaters. The climate-change analogy feels apt: the problem of racial segregation and exclusion had been wholly man-made. Powell's solution did not address the problem so much as redirect the forces around it. Diversity was the rainbow sign. After the flood, the fire next time.

The Reagan administration, no friends of civil rights, argued that affirmative action unfairly limited opportunities for whites. And in the coming years, opponents of affirmative action, whether conservative or liberal, broadened their attack on all manner of attempts to achieve racial and cultural equity — in jobs, government contracts, fair housing, bank loans, executive leadership, even university canons and desegregated schools — as antiwhite.

Those who study segregation now mark 1989 as the peak year of public school desegregation. That year, in *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Company*, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor reiterated that the court was loathe to weigh claims of past discrimination: "The dream of a Nation of equal citizens in a society where race is irrelevant to personal opportunity and achievement would be lost in a mosaic of shifting preferences based on inherently unmeasurable claims of past wrongs."²⁴ In a courageous minority opinion, Marshall raged that the decision was a "cynical . . . grapeshot attack on race-conscious remedies."²⁵ But so it would continue in a long series of cases and new laws that limited the scope of equity programs and accelerated the undoing of desegregation.

Resegregation relied on the restoration of racial innocence, which absolved generations of their responsibility while allowing inequality to evolve and intensify. At the heart of the resegregationist turn was the same decoupling of cause and effect Powell had accomplished in the *Bakke* decision.

In 2007, in a case touching on issues of desegregation and diversity, *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts concluded, "The way to stop discriminating on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race."²⁶ Here was the natural limit of Powell's diversity rationale. If diversity is acceptable, not least because it entertains, edifies, and can be exploited, then why continue the charade around equity? Roberts's circular logic placed itself beyond rebuttal, admitted no light, refused all other ways of seeing and being. It was the sound of one side folding up and walking away from the race conversation.

In their minority opinion to *Bakke*, Justices Brennan, White, Marshall, and Blackmun had warned against the colorblindness that becomes "myopia which masks the reality that many 'created equal' have been treated within our lifetimes as inferior both by the law and by their fellow citizens." Marshall went on to cite the race gaps in life expectancy, and reminded his fellow justices that "the position of the Negro today in America is the tragic but inevitable consequence of centuries of unequal treatment." He argued, "In light of the sorry history of discrimination and its devastating impact on the lives of Negroes, bringing the Negro into the mainstream of American life should be a state interest of the highest order. To fail to do so is to ensure that America will forever remain a divided society."²⁷

The distance between Marshall and Roberts is one way to map the *strangeness* — one of the root meanings of the Old French word "*diversité*" — of this current moment of polarization, the one side attaching inequality to history in order to warn of the consequences of reproducing inequity, the other side talking in circles. Diversity allows whites to remove themselves while requiring the Other to continue performing for them.

At the same moment that the courts, white legislators, and white voters were making the resegregationist turn, "diversity" suddenly became a buzzword. By 1996, Gingrich's Republicans declared that they were "the party of diversity." Diversity was good business. In 2000, Viacom purchased BET for \$3 billion, to add to a portfolio that included Logo TV for the LGBT market, Nickelodeon for kids, and a bunch of channels for white males ages eighteen to thirty-four. Fourteen years later, Apple purchased Beats Electronics, the company founded by Dr. Dre and Jimmy Iovine, for \$3 billion. Diversity became synonymous with profit making for all but the small businesses fighting for the right not to serve gay and transgender customers.

At the same time, while affirmative action programs were increasingly constrained by the courts and at the ballot box, public higher-ed technocrats tried to devise new programs to address

AT THE SAME MOMENT THAT THE COURTS, WHITE LEGISLATORS, AND WHITE VOTERS WERE MAKING THE RESEGREGATIONIST TURN, "DIVERSITY" SUDDENLY BECAME A BUZZWORD.

continued underrepresentation of students of color. In Texas, Florida, and California, admissions processes were altered to include versions of what has been called the “Top Ten” method — accepting the talented top tenth (or fourth or some similar proportion) of the students of each high school.

As Justice Blackmun had predicted, such processes were not a perfect substitute for programs that directly addressed racial underrepresentation. Numbers of Black, Latino, and American Indian students dropped dramatically. Rapid demographic change alone would not guarantee that students of color would reach equitable numbers. On the contrary, in most cases, it only increased the urgency to find replacement plans for affirmative action. The innovation of the Top Ten plans was that they treated the best students from underfunded inner-city high schools equally with those from the well-funded exurban ones. Yet even after the states implemented these plans, most universities never returned to the level of diversity or equity they had attained before affirmative action programs were gutted.

Even worse, the plans were built on an irony that Thurgood Marshall himself might have found tragic. The Top Ten plans began with the assumption that high school students were already unequally distributed by race and class. Their success depended completely on school resegregation. The more segregated by race and income the state’s high schools were, the better state universities would be able to create freshman diversity. In 1978, one rightly might have been dismayed by the desperation of such plans. But in three of the most racially diverse states in the country, there were no longer many other legal options to reverse resegregation in higher education.

DIVERSE LIKE YOU

What would Justice Marshall have thought of the half-time show of Super Bowl 50, which featured Beyoncé rocking a militant tribute to the Black Panther Party, accompanied by the quick-stepping Bruno Mars, a Filipino/Puerto Rican/Jewish son of Hawai’i, all but eclipsing the white rock headliner band, Coldplay. Would he have felt it was just another performance of diversity for whites? Would he have noted that only one of the thirty-two NFL team owners and only one of the top twenty power brokers in the music industry was of color?²⁸ People of color are allowed, even *required* to perform, and, especially these days on issues of race, to edify as well. “*Here you are now, entertain us.*” But are we allowed to lead?

Business leaders from Silicon Valley to Hollywood to Wall Street trumpet the virtues of diversity, but still face protests over the lack of Black and brown faces in their offices and boardrooms. Other whites, including many who would describe themselves as far to the left of Trump, show signs of diversity fatigue.²⁹ As Anna Holmes has written

of her white editors, who approach her to help them locate writers and editors of color, "I get the sense that for them, diversity is an end — a box to check off — rather than a starting point from which a more integrated, textured world is brought into being."³⁰

The group that has benefited the most from the revolution of opportunity has been white women. In 1960, male college graduates outnumbered female grads by 60 percent. Those numbers have now reversed.³¹ The gender pay gap persists, but during this ongoing "man-cession," many white women have been graduating directly into the most in-demand jobs in the economy. Affirmative action has helped white women close the income gap with white men.

Yet white women share their male counterparts' disdain for affirmative action, in similar numbers. The plaintiffs in all the major college affirmative action cases since *Bakke* have been white women. Younger whites are no more supportive of the program than older whites. Just one in three whites between the ages of seventeen and thirty-four support affirmative action, a negligible three percentage points higher than their elders.³² If the court made diversity for white people, it would seem it is naive about how the law produces equity and reproduces inequity — or worse, perhaps, it no longer believes in equity at all.

Not long ago, I was asked to give a keynote speech for a Diversity Week at a large public university in a large state, that is to say, a campus about to become "majority minority" in a state about to become majority minority as well. I got into a discussion with the director of the multicultural center about how the week had been going. She said she was concerned that

**"DIVERSITY" HAD BECOME ANOTHER
WORD FOR "THEM," A NEW CATEGORY
OF OTHERNESS.**

very few white students came to any of the week's events. They saw the word "diversity," she said, and decided to skip it. "Diversity" had become another word for "them," a new category of Otherness. Even the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, in its recent effort to address the #OscarsSoWhite controversy, changed its rules to increase "the number of women and *diverse members*."³³

And so diversity remains a premonition of racial apocalypse; a photo op and dash; a commodity conveying value; a marker of moral credibility, even fitness in the Darwinian sense; a term of corporate management; an offering of racial innocence and absolution; a refusal of protection to historically negated communities of color; a performance for entertainment or edification or exploitation; another boring lesson in tolerance and civility; a mark of Otherness.

But the fact that it appears as all of these things at once is yet another way to map the strangeness of this moment, or, to be more specific, the strangeness of whiteness. Demographic and cultural change has unsettled whites in their privilege. And so diversity presents itself as a lot

of confused, contradictory things at once, each indexed to the confused, contradictory states of whites themselves.

Yet these are not the only meanings that diversity necessarily need hold. Is it possible to reimagine diversity separated from histories of exclusion? What would diversity that liberated everyone look like?

NOTES

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³ Paul Lewis, Maria L. La Ganga, Sabrina Siddiqui, and Nicky Woolf, "Donald Trump cements frontrunner status after big win in Nevada," *Guardian*, February 24, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/23/donald-trump-wins-nevada-caucuses-results>.

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⁵ Tyler Cherry, "How Fox News' Primetime Lineup Demonized Black Lives Matter Protestors in 2015," *Media Matters for America*, December 29, 2015, <http://mediamatters.org/blog/2015/12/29/how-fox-news-primetime-lineup-demonized-black-1/207637>.

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¹⁰ Lisa Wade, "Doctoring Diversity: Race and Photoshop," *Sociological Images*, September 2, 2009, <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2009/09/02/doctoring-diversity-race-and-photoshop>.

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¹² Tamara Winfrey Harris, "Black Like Who? Rachel Dolezal's Harmful Masquerade," *New York Times*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/16/opinion/rachel-dolezals-harmful-masquerade.html>.

¹³ Deena Prichet, "A Campus More Colorful Than Reality: Beware That College Brochure," NPR, December 29, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/12/29/257765543/a-campus-more-colorful-than-reality-beware-that-college-brochure>.

¹⁴ Wade, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 14–15.

¹⁶ See especially Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

¹⁷ Anderson, p. 82.

¹⁸ President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Commencement Address at Howard University: 'To Fulfill These Rights,'" June 4, 1965. Available online at the LBJ Presidential Library website: <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>.

¹⁹ Lisa M. Stulberg and Anthony S. Chen, "The Origins of Race-Conscious Affirmative Action in Undergraduate Admissions: A Comparative Analysis of Institutional Change in Higher Education," *Sociology of Education* 87, no. 1 (2013).

²⁰ For a good discussion of the case of the University of Michigan, see Ellen Berrey's *The Enigma of Diversity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

²¹ "Reparation, American Style," *New York Times*, June 19, 1977.

²² Emphasis added. *University of California Regents v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 No. 76-811 (1978). Argued October 12, 1977. Decided June 28, 1979.

²³ Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness*, 158.

²⁴ *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469 No. 87-988 (1989). Argued October 5, 1988. Decided January 23, 1989.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 Et. Al.*, 426 F.3d 1162. No. 05-908. Argued December 4, 2006. Decided June 28, 2007.

²⁷ Bakke, *ibid.*

²⁸ Haeyoun Park, Josh Keller, and Josh Williams, "The Faces of American Power, Nearly as White as the Oscar Nominees," *New York Times*, February 26, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/02/26/us/race-of-american-power.html>.

²⁹ Esther Wang has written: "The writer Eula Biss posits that guilt is the dominant emotion of whiteness in the U.S., but I suspect that it's actually something else, and its core is something very different from guilt. Guilt implies a recognition of responsibility, culpability—knowing that you've violated some sort of unspoken social contract. The only social contract that exists in this country is this: You're supposed to know when it's OK to be racist, and when you have to hide it." Diversity fatigue is the weariness of having to hide it. On the other hand, what Wang calls "race fatigue" is the weariness people of color feel at having to negotiate double consciousness.

Esther Wang, "Watching And Reading About White People Having Sex Is My Escape," *BuzzFeed*, March 4, 2016, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/estherwang/why-i-love-watching-and-reading-about-white-people-having-30#.uvjyawAkV>.

³⁰ Anna Holmes, "Has 'Diversity' Lost Its Meaning?" *New York Times Magazine*, October 27, 2015.

³¹ Claudia Goldin, Lawrence Katz, and Ilyana Kuziemko, "The Homecoming of American College Women: The Reversal of the College Gender Gap," National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 12139 (March 2006). Hannah Rosin, *The End of Men and the Rise of Women* (New York: Riverhead, 2012): 4.

³² Sean McElwee and Jesse Rhodes, "Young whites view race with rose-tinted glasses," *Al-Jazeera America*, January 18, 2016, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2016/1/affirmative-action-remains-deeply-divisive.html>.

³³ Emphasis added. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, "Academy Takes Historic Action to Increase Diversity," January 22, 2016, <http://www.oscars.org/news/academy-takes-historic-action-increase-diversity>.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. More than once in this chapter, Chang establishes diversity and racial justice as a young person's issue, and particularly addresses those young people positioned on college campuses. Reread Chang's piece, marking moments that make reference to college, education, and young people. How do these threads support Chang's premise that diversity is for white people? Structurally, how does Chang use these narrative moments as links between his ideas? What evidence can you find that supports the intentionality of the placement of these narrative moments?
2. Chang frames this essay with questions. The first line asks, "Is diversity for white people?" The last lines ask, "Is it possible to reimagine diversity separated from histories of exclusion? What would diversity that liberated everyone look like?" Based on textual evidence, who do you believe is Chang's intended audience? Why do you think he bookended his essay with questions? What purpose do they serve? Would Chang's intended audience be more or less likely to engage with this text if invited into it? Why or why not?
3. Reread Chang's piece with an eye toward how he uses research to support his points. Chang incorporates quotes from Donald Trump, Supreme Court justices, historians, journalists, and student voices, as well as citing statistical

evidence and narrative examples. At the same time, Chang's writing style is conversational, clear, and at times informal. What do you think he was trying to achieve through this combination of academic content and a conversational voice? What about this combination might draw a reader into the piece, and what might alienate one from it? Can you think of other topics that might benefit from this combination?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. As noted in the first "Question for a Second Reading," Chang spends a good deal of time discussing the role of diversity in higher education. He focuses on the example at the University of Wisconsin where the image of Diallo Shabazz was digitally placed in admissions materials showing him at a football game he never attended (p. 235). Chang uses this example to illustrate the ways that diversity is understood, communicated, discussed, and represented by universities and the culture at large. In this assignment, we invite you to consider some of Chang's questions through an examination of a particular school's discussion and representation of diversity in their admissions pages and other recruitment materials. First, choose a school — it might be your own or one far from where you are now — and then select three to four significant moments from these materials: quotes from the texts you find, particular images, or perhaps even the lack of particular language or images.

Write an essay in which you consider the questions Chang raises through an examination of the selected school's recruitment, admissions, and public profile materials. What kinds of representations of diversity do you find? Who do these representations seem to be for? How can you tell? How might you use Chang's essay as a lens through which to analyze this material? What would Chang say about it? How do you know that is what he would say? And, finally, how does Chang's essay (if it does) cause you to think of the materials differently than you might have before reading the piece?

2. Chang writes, "What Trump understood best was how banal facts could be marshaled to unleash hysterical exigency" (p. 223). There is a lot to think about in this sentence; Chang seems to be raising a complex point about a particular political and cultural moment. Write an essay in which you consider the significance of this quote. You might begin by providing your readers with a very close reading of the sentence — paying particular attention to each word choice and its meaning. As you interpret its meaning, consider both the quotation's immediate context within the essay, as well as the broader cultural context Chang evokes. What, after all, does Chang mean when he says this? What examples can you point to in order to illustrate his point?

Once you have unpacked the meaning of Chang's assertion, move to your own examples. Where else have you seen "banal facts" used to "unleash" a kind of hysteria? What, for you, is the meaning of the word *fact* and how can an understanding of that word help us to think about the current moment in American culture and politics? What ways of thinking or educating would build a world where "banal facts" could not be used in this way? What would a reader/listener/viewer need to do or know in order to make sure a banal fact could not unleash in them "hysterical exigency"?

3. Chang's title turns our attention to the term *diversity* as one of the major concepts at the center of the essay. But there are many other terms through which we could think about Chang's work — terms like *white fragility*, *racial capitalism*, *blackface minstrelsy*. For this assignment, we invite you to reread Chang's essay in search of a significant word or phrase; it can be one you have never heard before or one you have heard many times. Write an essay in which you consider this particular term. What does it mean both in Chang's essay and more broadly? We encourage you to do some research to answer this question. How is the term being used by others? Why have you heard the term many times or not at all? How does Chang's essay help you explain your answer to this last question? Finally, how does this term function as significant to Chang's essay — why is the term *in* the essay? How does the term function within it and beyond it?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Chang's essay moves around in time; he begins with the 2015 campaign for president, but the events referenced in his essay span more than fifty years of American history and popular culture. He does a lot of work as a writer to connect more contemporary moments to other important historical moments. There are other writers in this collection whose analyses of a contemporary moment might be said to be inextricably linked to other moments in history — Susan Griffin, Jennine Capó Crucet, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Claudia Rankine, and Gloria Bird, just to name a few. There are likewise other writers — Edward Said, Michel Foucault, and June Jordan, for example — whose work focuses on a moment from the past that might illuminate the present. In this way, for many writers, time is a pendulum of connection whereby history is always part of the contemporary moment, and a way of understanding our moment right now.

Choose two or three writers from the above list and write an essay in which you consider the ways that each writer connects the past and the present. Which events of the past seem most relevant to this moment right now? How do writers make that visible to readers? What approach does each writer take to imagining the connections between the past and the present?

And finally, how do these essays want you to think about time, history, and your current moment? What is your response?

2. In our Introduction, we write the following:

But there is another kind of difficulty teachers and students alike will face in encountering the readings here. This difficulty stems from coming into contact with perspectives and descriptions of the world that you find difficult to hear. Perhaps because your own identity and perspective is either very distant or very close to the ones taken up in a given reading. Or perhaps because it is often difficult to acknowledge and take account of what is urgently and gravely wrong in our current cultural and political moment. The texts here challenge us to *be* writers – which means, in a fundamental sense, to be willing to look carefully, closely, and unrelentingly both at the world as you imagine it to be and at the world as it is for those who are *not* you. In this spirit, we invite you to develop and nurture new ways of reading for yourself, new ways of listening when someone else (for example, an author of one of the texts in this book) is speaking. We believe this will not only make you a better reader and writer, but it will also make you a more attentive and precise thinker in your life at large – both your academic life *and* your personal/social/professional life as you move through and leave your college experience. (p. 2)

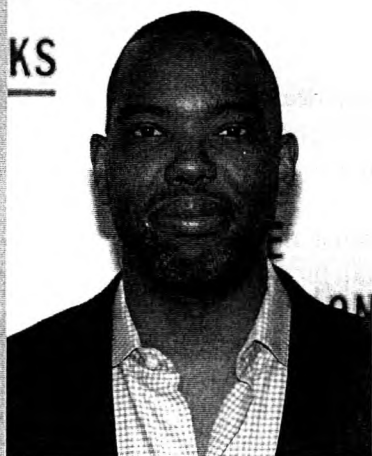
In this assignment, we invite you to consider again this idea of “the world as you imagine it to be and the world as it is for those who are *not* you.” You might begin by describing what you think we mean in the above passage and how that might connect to your own reading of Chang. Where do you see yourself or your world in Chang’s essay? What experiences do you bring to your reading of the text; in other words, how does your own identity and experience shape the way you understand Chang’s work? Along these lines, we’d like you to consider other essays in this collection that might be “difficult” for you to read. These can be essays you have already explored in your writing course or essays that are new to you. Read through the introductions and first pages of essays that stand out to you to discover one or two other essays that seem “difficult.” Write an essay in which you consider your experience with Chang’s essay and connect that experience to another essay in the collection: What does it mean for a text to be difficult? How can you tell it will be (or is) difficult for you? How does the writer anticipate (or not) your difficulty? And what strategies as a reader can you use to grapple both intellectually and emotionally with this kind of difficulty?

3. In this particular essay, Chang does not talk about himself very much as he tries to raise some challenging political questions about race, representation, and social justice. In other essays, such as Cruet’s “Going Cowboy” (p. 258) or Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “Between the World and Me” (p. 242), the authors draw

more directly from their own experiences to raise questions about these same issues. Write an essay in which you consider the relationship between self-disclosure and the effectiveness of an argument. Comparing Chang's essay with one of the others, what do you notice about their effects on you as a reader? How do you respond to those more "personal" moments? What might be different about Chang's essay if he talked about himself — or about Crucet's essay if she didn't? What, for you, is the role of personal experience in making arguments, raising questions, and offering critiques? As you write your essay, consider the degree to which you might employ self-disclosure yourself, and to what effect.

KS

Andy Kropa/AP Images



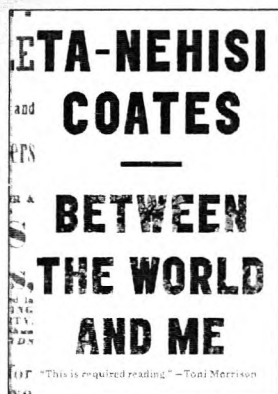
TA-NEHISI Coates

Ta-Nehisi Coates (b. 1975), a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, is the author of the memoir *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood* (2008) and the *New York Times* bestseller *Between the World and Me* (2015). He has served as Journalist in Residence at the Graduate School of Journalism at City University of New York and has received numerous writing awards, including the 2016 PEN/Diamonstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay and the 2015 National Book Award for Nonfiction for *Between the World and Me*. In 2015, he received a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship.

Coates also authors a run of the Marvel Comic *Black Panther*, about the first major black superhero. The Black Panther rules Wakanda, a fictional technologically advanced nation, but Coates says he pulls story lines for the series from "the very real history of society." When the first issue was released on April 6, 2016, Marvel editor-in-chief Axel Alonso called it "the buzz book of the industry."

Both of Coates's books ground readers in his experiences growing up in the Mondawmin neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland. *Between the World and Me* takes the form of a series of essays written to Coates's son. Toni Morrison has called it "required reading" and "as profound as it is revelatory" in "its examination of the hazards and hopes of black male life." *Publishers Weekly* named it "a classic of our time," and the *New York Observer* called Coates "the single best writer on the subject of race in the United States."

Our excerpt from *Between the World and Me* presents readers with Coates's thinking about what it might mean for him, a black man, to literally and figuratively lose his body, and what it means to live in an American reality where people "believe" themselves to be white, where "race is the child of racism," and where fear inflects the stories he tells his son about his past and those on the front pages of newspapers about brutal murders and beatings of African Americans by police.



Speaking in a 2013 taped interview for *The Atlantic* about writing, Coates shared his struggles and the difficulty of writing openly. He said,

Breakthroughs come from stress . . . from putting an inordinate amount of pressure on yourself and seeing what you can take and hoping that you grow some new muscles. It's not really that mystical. . . . It's like repeated practice over and over again. . . . I strongly believe that writing is an act of courage. . . . Perseverance is so key to writing.

.....

Between the World and Me

Son,

Last Sunday the host of a popular news show asked me what it meant to lose my body. The host was broadcasting from Washington, D.C., and I was seated in a remote studio on the far west side of Manhattan. A satellite closed the miles between us, but no machinery could close the gap between her world and the world for which I had been summoned to speak. When the host asked me about my body, her face faded from the screen, and was replaced by a scroll of words, written by me earlier that week.

The host read these words for the audience, and when she finished she turned to the subject of my body, although she did not mention it specifically. But by now I am accustomed to intelligent people asking about the condition of my body without realizing the nature of their request. Specifically, the host wished to know why I felt that white America's progress, or rather the progress of those Americans who believe that they are white, was built on looting and violence. Hearing this, I felt an old and indistinct sadness well up in me. The answer to this question is the record of the believers themselves. The answer is American history.

There is nothing extreme in this statement. Americans deify democracy in a way that allows for a dim awareness that they have, from time to time, stood in defiance of their God. But democracy is a forgiving God and America's heresies — torture, theft, enslavement — are so common among individuals and nations that none can declare themselves immune. In fact, Americans, in a real sense, have never betrayed their God. When Abraham Lincoln declared, in 1863, that the battle of Gettysburg must ensure "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth," he was not merely being aspirational; at the onset of the Civil War, the United States of America had one of the highest rates of suffrage in the world. The question is not whether Lincoln truly meant "government of the people" but what our country has, throughout its history, taken the political term "people" to actually mean. In 1863 it did not mean your mother or your grandmother, and it did not mean you and me. Thus America's problem is not its betrayal of "government of the people," but the means by which "the people" acquired their names.

This leads us to another equally important ideal, one that Americans implicitly accept but to which they make no conscious claim. Americans believe in the reality of "race" as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism — the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them — inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent

daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men.

But race is the child of racism, not the father. And the process of naming "the people" has never been a matter of genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy. Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible — this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white.

These new people are, like us, a modern invention. But unlike us, their new name has no real meaning divorced from the machinery of criminal power. The new people were something else before they

AMERICANS BELIEVE IN THE REALITY OF "RACE" AS A DEFINED, INDUBITABLE FEATURE OF THE NATURAL WORLD.

were white — Catholic, Corsican, Welsh, Mennonite, Jewish — and if all our national hopes have any fulfillment, then they will have to be something else again. Perhaps they will truly become American and create a nobler basis for their myths. I can not call it. As for now, it must be said that the process of washing the disparate tribes white, the elevation of the belief in being white, was not achieved through wine tastings and ice cream socials, but rather through the pillaging of life, liberty, labor, and land; through the flaying of backs; the chaining of limbs; the strangling of dissidents; the destruction of families; the rape of mothers; the sale of children; and various other acts meant, first and foremost, to deny you and me the right to secure and govern our own bodies.

The new people are not original in this. Perhaps there has been, at some point in history, some great power whose elevation was exempt from the violent exploitation of other human bodies. If there has been, I have yet to discover it. But this banality of violence can never excuse America, because America makes no claim to the banal. America believes itself exceptional, the greatest and noblest nation ever to exist, a lone champion standing between the white city of democracy and the terrorists, despots, barbarians, and other enemies of civilization. One cannot, at once, claim to be superhuman and then plead mortal error. I propose to take our countrymen's claims of American exceptionalism seriously, which is to say I propose subjecting our country to an exceptional moral standard. This is difficult because there exists, all around us, an apparatus urging us to accept American innocence at face value and not to inquire too much. And it is so easy to look away, to live with the fruits of our history and to ignore the great evil done in all of our names. But you and I have never truly had that luxury. I think you know.

I write you in your fifteenth year. I am writing you because this was the year you saw Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes; because you know now that Renisha McBride was shot for seeking help,

that John Crawford was shot down for browsing in a department store. And you have seen men in uniform drive by and murder Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old child whom they were oath-bound to protect. And you have seen men in the same uniforms pummel Marlene Pinnock, someone's grandmother, on the side of a road. And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. Sell cigarettes without the proper authority and your body can be destroyed. Resent the people trying to entrap your body and it can be destroyed. Turn into a dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include friskings, detainings, beatings, and humiliations. All of this is common to black people. And all of this is old for black people. No one is held responsible.

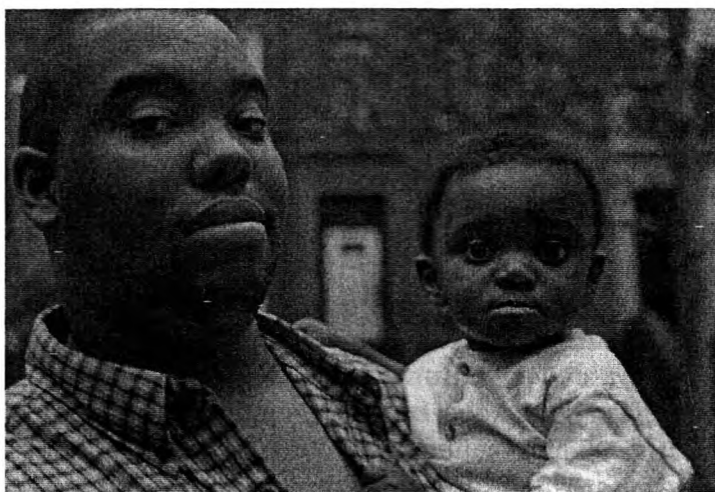
There is nothing uniquely evil in these destroyers or even in this moment. The destroyers are merely men enforcing the whims of our country, correctly interpreting its heritage and legacy. It is hard to face this. But all our phrasing — race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy — serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.

That Sunday, with that host, on that news show, I tried to explain this as best I could within the time allotted. But at the end of the segment, the host flashed a widely shared picture of an eleven-year-old black boy tearfully hugging a white police officer. Then she asked me about "hope." And I knew then that I had failed. And I remembered that I had expected to fail. And I wondered again at the indistinct sadness welling up in me. Why exactly was I sad? I came out of the studio and walked for a while. It was a calm December day. Families, believing themselves white, were out on the streets. Infants, raised to be white, were bundled in strollers. And I was sad for these people, much as I was sad for the host and sad for all the people out there watching and reveling in a specious hope. I realized then why I was sad. When the journalist asked me about my body, it was like she was asking me to awaken her from the most gorgeous dream. I have seen that dream all my life. It is perfect houses with nice lawns. It is Memorial Day cookouts, block associations, and driveways. The Dream is treehouses and the Cub Scouts. The Dream smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake. And for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, to fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies. And knowing this, knowing that the Dream

persists by warring with the known world, I was sad for the host, I was sad for all those families, I was sad for my country, but above all, in that moment, I was sad for you.

That was the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free. The men who had left his body in the street like some awesome declaration of their inviolable power would never be punished. It was not my expectation that anyone would ever be punished. But you were young and still believed. You stayed up till 11 p.m. that night, waiting for the announcement of an indictment, and when instead it was announced that there was none you said, "I've got to go," and you went into your room, and I heard you crying. I came in five minutes after, and I didn't hug you, and I didn't comfort you, because I thought it would be wrong to comfort you. I did not tell you that it would be okay, because I have never believed it would be okay. What I told you is what your grandparents tried to tell me: that this is your country, that this is your world, that this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it. I tell you now that the question of how one should live within a black body, within a country lost in the Dream, is the question of my life, and the pursuit of this question, I have found, ultimately answers itself.

This must seem strange to you. We live in a "goal-oriented" era. Our media vocabulary is full of hot takes, big ideas, and grand theories of everything. But some time ago I rejected magic in all its forms. This rejection was a gift from your grandparents, who never tried to console me with ideas of an afterlife and were skeptical of preordained American glory. In accepting both the chaos of history and the fact of my total end, I was freed to truly consider how I wished to live — specifically, how do I live free in this black body? It is a profound question because America understands itself as God's handiwork, but the black body is the clearest evidence that America is the work of men. I have asked the question through my reading and writings, through the music of my youth, through arguments with your grandfather, with your mother, your aunt Janai, your uncle Ben. I have searched for answers in nationalist myth, in classrooms, out on the streets,



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and on other continents. The question is unanswerable, which is not to say futile. The greatest reward of this constant interrogation, of confrontation with the brutality of my country, is that it has freed me from ghosts and girded me against the sheer terror of disembodiment.

And I am afraid. I feel the fear most acutely whenever you leave me. But I was afraid long before you, and in this I was unoriginal. When I was your age the only people I knew were black, and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid. I had seen this fear all my young life, though I had not always recognized it as such.

It was always right in front of me. The fear was there in the extravagant boys of my neighborhood, in their large rings and medallions, their big puffy coats and full-length fur-collared leathers, which was their armor against their world. They would stand on the corner of Gwynn Oak and Liberty, or Cold Spring and Park Heights, or outside Mondawmin Mall, with their hands dipped in Russell sweats. I think back on those

boys now and all I see is fear, and all

**WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE THE ONLY
PEOPLE I KNEW WERE BLACK, AND
ALL OF THEM WERE POWERFULLY,
ADAMANTLY, DANGEROUSLY AFRAID.**

I see is them girding themselves against the ghosts of the bad old days when the Mississippi mob gathered 'round their grandfathers so that the branches of the black body might be torched, then cut away. The fear lived on in their practiced bop, their slouch-

ing denim, their big T-shirts, the calculated angle of their baseball caps, a catalog of behaviors and garments enlisted to inspire the belief that these boys were in firm possession of everything they desired.

I saw it in their customs of war. I was no older than five, sitting out on the front steps of my home on Woodbrook Avenue, watching two shirtless boys circle each other close and buck shoulders. From then on, I knew that there was a ritual to a street fight, bylaws and codes that, in their very need, attested to all the vulnerability of the black teenage bodies.

I heard the fear in the first music I ever knew, the music that pumped from boom boxes full of grand boast and bluster. The boys who stood out on Garrison and Liberty up on Park Heights loved this music because it told them, against all evidence and odds, that they were masters of their own lives, their own streets, and their own bodies. I saw it in the girls, in their loud laughter, in their gilded bamboo earrings that announced their names thrice over. And I saw it in their brutal language and hard gaze, how they would cut you with their eyes and destroy you with their words for the sin of playing too much. "Keep my name out your mouth," they would say. I would watch them after school, how they squared off like boxers, vaselined up, earrings off, Reeboks on, and leaped at each other.

I felt the fear in the visits to my Nana's home in Philadelphia. You never knew her. I barely knew her, but what I remember is her hard manner, her rough voice. And I knew that my father's father was dead and that my uncle Oscar was dead and that my uncle David was dead and that each of these instances was unnatural. And I saw it in my own father, who loves

you, who counsels you, who slipped me money to care for you. My father was so very afraid. I felt it in the sting of his black leather belt, which he applied with more anxiety than anger, my father who beat me as if someone might steal me away, because that is exactly what was happening all around us. Everyone had lost a child, somehow, to the streets, to jail, to drugs, to guns. It was said that these lost girls were sweet as honey and would not hurt a fly. It was said that these lost boys had just received a GED and had begun to turn their lives around. And now they were gone, and their legacy was a great fear.

Have they told you this story? When your grandmother was sixteen years old a young man knocked on her door. The young man was your Nana Jo's boyfriend. No one else was home. Ma allowed this young man to sit and wait until your Nana Jo returned. But your great-grandmother got there first. She asked the young man to leave. Then she beat your grandmother terrifically, one last time, so that she might remember how easily she could lose her body. Ma never forgot. I remember her clutching my small hand tightly as we crossed the street. She would tell me that if I ever let go and were killed by an onrushing car, she would beat me back to life. When I was six, Ma and Dad took me to a local park. I slipped from their gaze and found a playground. Your grandparents spent anxious minutes looking for me. When they found me, Dad did what every parent I knew would have done — he reached for his belt. I remember watching him in a kind of daze, awed at the distance between punishment and offense. Later, I would hear it in Dad's voice — "Either I can beat him, or the police." Maybe that saved me. Maybe it didn't. All I know is, the violence rose from the fear like smoke from a fire, and I cannot say whether that violence, even administered in fear and love, sounded the alarm or choked us at the exit. What I know is that fathers who slammed their teenage boys for sass would then release them to streets where their boys employed, and were subject to, the same justice. And I knew mothers who belted their girls, but the belt could not save these girls from drug dealers twice their age. We, the children, employed our darkest humor to cope. We stood in the alley where we shot basketballs through hollowed crates and cracked jokes on the boy whose mother wore him out with a beating in front of his entire fifth-grade class. We sat on the number five bus, headed downtown, laughing at some girl whose mother was known to reach for anything — cable wires, extension cords, pots, pans. We were laughing, but I know that we were afraid of those who loved us most. Our parents resorted to the lash the way flagellants in the plague years resorted to the scourge.

To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease. The nakedness is not an error, nor pathology. The nakedness is the correct and intended result of policy, the predictable upshot of people forced for centuries to live under fear. The law did not protect us. And now, in your time, the law has become an excuse for stopping and frisking you, which is to say, for furthering the assault on your body. But a society that protects some people through a safety net of schools, government-backed

home loans, and ancestral wealth but can only protect you with the club of criminal justice has either failed at enforcing its good intentions or has succeeded at something much darker. However you call it, the result was our infirmity before the criminal forces of the world. It does not matter if the agent of those forces is white or black — what matters is our condition, what matters is the system that makes your body breakable.

The revelation of these forces, a series of great changes, has unfolded over the course of my life. The changes are still unfolding and will likely continue until I die. I was eleven years old, standing out in the parking lot in front of the 7-Eleven, watching a crew of older boys standing near the street. They yelled and gestured at . . . who? . . . another boy, young, like me, who stood there, almost smiling, gamely throwing up his hands. He had already learned the lesson he would teach me that day: that his body was in constant jeopardy. Who knows what brought him to that knowledge? The projects, a drunken stepfather, an older brother concussed by police, a cousin pinned in the city jail. That he was outnumbered did not matter because the whole world had outnumbered him long ago, and what do numbers matter? This was a war for the possession of his body and that would be the war of his whole life.

I stood there for some seconds, marveling at the older boys' beautiful sense of fashion. They all wore ski jackets, the kind which, in my day, mothers put on layaway in September, then piled up overtime hours so as to have the thing wrapped and ready for Christmas. I focused in on a light-skinned boy with a long head and small eyes. He was scowling at another boy, who was standing close to me. It was just before three in the afternoon. I was in sixth grade. School had just let out, and it was not yet the fighting weather of early spring. What was the exact problem here? Who could know?

The boy with the small eyes reached into his ski jacket and pulled out a gun. I recall it in the slowest motion, as though in a dream. There the boy stood, with the gun brandished, which he slowly untucked, tucked, then untucked once more, and in his small eyes I saw a surging rage that could, in an instant, erase my body. That was 1986. That year I felt myself to be drowning in the news reports of murder. I was aware that these murders very often did not land upon the intended targets but fell upon great-aunts, PTA mothers, overtime uncles, and joyful children — fell upon them random and relentless, like great sheets of rain. I knew this in theory but could not understand it as fact until the boy with the small eyes stood across from me holding my entire body in his small hands. The boy did not shoot. His friends pulled him back. He did not need to shoot. He had affirmed my place in the order of things. He had let it be known how easily I could be selected. I took the subway home that day, processing the episode all alone. I did not tell my parents. I did not tell my teachers, and if I told my friends I would have done so with all the excitement needed to obscure the fear that came over me in that moment.

I remember being amazed that death could so easily rise up from the nothing of a boyish afternoon, billow up like fog. I knew that West Baltimore,

where I lived; that the north side of Philadelphia, where my cousins lived; that the South Side of Chicago, where friends of my father lived, comprised a world apart. Somewhere out there beyond the firmament, past the asteroid belt, there were other worlds where children did not regularly fear for their bodies. I knew this because there was a large television resting in my living room. In the evenings I would sit before this television bearing witness to the dispatches from this other world. There were little white boys with complete collections of football cards, and their only want was a popular girlfriend and their only worry was poison oak. That other world was suburban and endless, organized around pot roasts, blueberry pies, fireworks, ice cream sundaes, immaculate bathrooms, and small toy trucks that were loosed in wooded backyards with streams and glens. Comparing these dispatches with the facts of my native world, I came to understand that my country was a galaxy, and this galaxy stretched from the pandemonium of West Baltimore to the happy hunting grounds of *Mr. Belvedere*. I obsessed over the distance between that other sector of space and my own. I knew that my portion of the American galaxy, where bodies were enslaved by a tenacious gravity, was black and that the other, liberated portion was not. I knew that some inscrutable energy preserved the breach. I felt, but did not yet understand, the relation between that other world and me. And I felt in this a cosmic injustice, a profound cruelty, which infused an abiding, irrepressible desire to unshackle my body and achieve the velocity of escape.

Do you ever feel that same need? Your life is so very different from my own. The grandness of the world, the real world, the whole world, is a known thing for you. And you have no need of dispatches because you have seen so much of the American galaxy and its inhabitants — their homes, their hobbies — up close. I don't know what it means to grow up with a black president, social networks, omnipresent media, and black women everywhere in their natural hair. What I know is that when they loosed the killer of Michael Brown, you said, "I've got to go." And that cut me because, for all our differing worlds, at your age my feeling was exactly the same. And I recall that even then I had not yet begun to imagine the perils that tangle us. You still believe the injustice was Michael Brown. You have not yet grappled with your own myths and narratives and discovered the plunder everywhere around us.

Before I could discover, before I could escape, I had to survive, and this could only mean a clash with the streets, by which I mean not just physical blocks, nor simply the people packed into them, but the array of lethal puzzles and strange perils that seem to rise up from the asphalt itself. The streets transform every ordinary day into a series of trick questions, and every incorrect answer risks a beatdown, a shooting, or a pregnancy. No one survives unscathed. And yet the heat that springs from the constant danger, from a lifestyle of near-death experience, is thrilling. This is what the rappers mean when they pronounce themselves addicted to "the streets" or in love with "the game." I imagine they feel something akin to parachutists, rock climbers, BASE jumpers, and others who choose

to live on the edge. Of course we chose nothing. And I have never believed the brothers who claim to “run,” much less “own,” the city. We did not design the streets. We do not fund them. We do not preserve them. But I was there, nevertheless, charged like all the others with the protection of my body.

The crews, the young men who’d transmuted their fear into rage, were the greatest danger. The crews walked the blocks of their neighborhood, loud and rude, because it was only through their loud rudeness that they might feel any sense of security and power. They would break your jaw, stomp your face, and shoot you down to feel that power, to revel in the might of their own bodies. And their wild reveling, their astonishing acts made their names ring out. Reps were made, atrocities recounted. And so in my Baltimore it was known that when Cherry Hill rolled through you rolled the other way, that North and Pulaski was not an intersection but a hurricane, leaving only splinters and shards in its wake. In that fashion, the security of these neighborhoods flowed downward and became the security of the bodies living there. You steered clear of Jo-Jo, for instance, because he was cousin to Keon, the don of Murphy Homes. In other cities, indeed in other Baltimores, the neighborhoods had other handles and the boys went by other names, but their mission did not change: prove the inviolability of their block, of their bodies, through their power to crack knees, ribs, and arms. This practice was so common that today you can approach any black person raised in the cities of that era and they can tell you which crew ran which hood in their city, and they can tell you the names of all the captains and all their cousins and offer an anthology of all their exploits.

To survive the neighborhoods and shield my body, I learned another language consisting of a basic complement of head nods and handshakes. I memorized a list of prohibited blocks. I learned the smell and feel of fighting weather. And I learned that “Shorty, can I see your bike?” was never a sincere question, and “Yo, you was messing with my cousin” was

**I RECALL LEARNING THESE LAWS
CLEARER THAN I RECALL LEARNING
MY COLORS AND SHAPES, BECAUSE
THESE LAWS WERE ESSENTIAL TO THE
SECURITY OF MY BODY.**

neither an earnest accusation nor a misunderstanding of the facts. These were the summonses that you answered with your left foot forward, your right foot back, your hands guarding your face, one slightly lower than the other, cocked like a hammer. Or they were answered by breaking out, ducking through alleys, cutting through back-

yards, then bounding through the door past your kid brother into your bedroom, pulling the tool out of your lambskin or from under your mattress or out of your Adidas shoebox, then calling up your own cousins (who really aren’t) and returning to that same block, on that same day, and to that same crew, hollering out, “Yeah, nigger, what’s up now?” I recall learning these laws clearer than I recall learning my colors and shapes, because these laws were essential to the security of my body.

I think of this as a great difference between us. You have some acquaintance with the old rules, but they are not as essential to you as they were to me. I am sure that you have had to deal with the occasional roughneck on the subway or in the park, but when I was about your age, each day, fully one-third of my brain was concerned with who I was walking to school with, our precise number, the manner of our walk, the number of times I smiled, who or what I smiled at, who offered a pound and who did not — all of which is to say that I practiced the culture of the streets, a culture concerned chiefly with securing the body. I do not long for those days. I have no desire to make you “tough” or “street,” perhaps because any “toughness” I garnered came reluctantly. I think I was always, somehow, aware of the price. I think I somehow knew that that third of my brain should have been concerned with more beautiful things. I think I felt that something out there, some force, nameless and vast, had robbed me of . . . what? Time? Experience? I think you know something of what that third could have done, and I think that is why you may feel the need for escape even more than I did. You have seen all the wonderful life up above the tree-line, yet you understand that there is no real distance between you and Trayvon Martin, and thus Trayvon Martin must terrify you in a way that he could never terrify me. You have seen so much more of all that is lost when they destroy your body.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. The book *Between the World and Me* makes direct reference to a poem of the same title by Richard Wright, and many reviewers of *Between the World and Me* have thought about James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, a book that also features an older African American addressing a young man, in this case a nephew. Wright's poem is readily available online, and your college or university library likely has a copy of Baldwin's book. Select one of the two — the Wright poem or the Baldwin book — and, perhaps in a group, prepare an informal presentation on how you see Coates responding to, or in conversation with, this prior text.
2. At one point in this selection, recalling his past, Coates says, “I came out of the studio and walked for a while. It was a calm December day. Families, believing themselves white, were out on the streets. Infants, raised to be white, were bundled in strollers” (p. 244). What does Coates mean by “believing themselves white”? As you reread, let this phrase stand as an invitation to you as a reader. How does this construction function as a central aspect of Coates's arguments about race and identity?
3. Coates argues that “Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. . . . In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore [it] the

way one deploras . . . any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men" (pp. 242–43). In the paragraph that follows, he writes that "race is the child of racism, not the father." If the reality of race is not this "defined, indubitable feature of the natural world" that Americans believe it is, then what is it? And how, then, is race "the child of racism"? How, in other words, is Coates asking you as a reader to understand Americans' rendering of race and racism?

4. As you reread Coates's selection, mark those moments where he refers to bodies, the "condition of [his] body," the bodies of African Americans, his son's body, living in a black body, and the nakedness of black bodies. Make a two-column chart. In the left column, write out the references to bodies that strike you as significant. In the right column, jot down what you understand each reference to be saying. After you've done this, step back from your chart and notes. What is Coates saying about the bodies of African Americans — literally and figuratively? Why do you think he says he is "accustomed to intelligent people asking about the condition of [his] body without realizing the nature of their request" (p. 242)? What, to Coates, is the nature of this request?



ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Coates's "Between the World and Me" is written as a direct address between an African American father and his son — and not just a generic African American father and son but, we learn as we read, a very specific pair defined by family, circumstance, place, and time.

Whatever your race or gender, where, as a reader, do you locate yourself in this exchange? Where do you find yourself most engaged? Where do you feel that you, too, are being addressed or invited to respond? As you reread, mark places where you feel, as a reader, an opening in this selection. What does it mean, or what does it take, to be a reader in the face of a text like this one?

Write an essay, perhaps in the shape of a review for a magazine or newspaper, in which you consider this book's considerable success and the demands it places on its readers.

2. Coates writes to his son,

I propose to take our countrymen's claims of American exceptionalism seriously, which is to say I propose subjecting our country to an exceptional moral standard. This is difficult because there exists, all around us, an apparatus urging us to accept American innocence at face value and not to inquire too much. And it is so easy to look away, to live with the fruits of our history and to ignore the great evil done in all of our names. But you and I have never truly had that luxury. (p. 243)

What, in your experience, is this apparatus that urges us “to accept American innocence at face value and not to inquire too much” about “the great evil done in all of our names”? Coates offers us examples. He points to the actions of police that cover up brutal killings of black people. He points to “the Dream,” as he calls it, that “persists by warring with the known world” (pp. 244–45). And he points to policies and practices directed at “people forced for centuries to live under fear” (p. 247).

Work with a partner to point to and name the apparatuses — the policies and practices and beliefs and histories — that urge you not to inquire too much about race and racism. Once you’ve identified and talked through your examples, each of you should write an essay in which you explain these apparatuses and the ways that they urge *you* not to inquire too much. Imagine that you are writing for readers who have read Coates’s selection but haven’t thought through the question and examples you are working with.

3. Write an essay in which you explain Coates’s key arguments, his passionate pleas to his son, about race, racism, and the idea that people “have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white” (p. 243). Imagine that you are writing to an audience of readers who have not read Coates’s selection and who have not thought about it or worked with it in the ways that you have.

You might also consider these questions: How can you tell, as a reader, that an argument in Coates’s work is a “key” argument? What moves does Coates make, as a writer, to signal to you that particular passages or points are central to his work?

4. Coates’s expertise as a writer invites us into scenes and landscapes to see what he sees, to recognize fear, to see grandfathers and “extravagant boys” and his neighborhoods, to catch the glint of “gilded bamboo earrings” and a father’s worry in a few spoken sentences.

For this assignment, reread paragraphs 13–23 on pages 246–49 (beginning with “And I am afraid. I feel the fear most acutely whenever you leave me” and ending with “And I felt in this a cosmic injustice, a profound cruelty, which infused an abiding, irrepressible desire to unshackle my body and achieve the velocity of escape”). Coates, in these pages, is working with fear through moments and landscapes that he re-creates in paragraphs, often beginning with invocations such as “I heard the fear in the first music I ever knew,” “It was always right in front of me,” “I felt the fear in the visits to my Nana’s home,” and “Have they told you this story?” He writes spare, compelling sentences. They make use of such devices as repetition, questions, quoted language, and, of course, descriptions of events and people.

Reread these paragraphs a couple of times to identify a moment or a landscape or an event that you’d like to work with in the spirit of Coates. Imagine that you are taking his decisions, movements, and qualities as a writer as your writing teacher. Allow Coates’s writerly approach to become

your model. Once you've identified the section you'd like to work with, write it out on a sheet of paper. Write by hand. Don't type. Writing it out will slow you down so that you can notice the language and sentence structures, the way the section begins and evolves. Once you've written it out and studied its craft, write a section of your own that imitates Coates. Work toward writing sentences like his, with the same structure and punctuation, the same rhythms, and work toward writing your section with the same number of sentences and the same overall evolving structure. His stories of fear resonate emotionally; they give us fear in words. When you choose what you'll write about, you may or may not be able to create that kind of emotional resonance; don't be concerned about it. You're working here as a writer apprentice to Coates.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. As Kwame Anthony Appiah prepares for the final section of his essay "Racial Identities" (p. 38), he offers a surprising list to counter what he refers to as the "imperialism of identity":

In policing this imperialism of identity — an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else — it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics; mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism — and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go — let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies. (p. 58)

Ta-Nehisi Coates also raises questions about racial identity, although in a different register and defined in terms of a different dramatic encounter. If Appiah were to select a passage from "Between the World and Me" to bring into his essay, what might it be? If the speaker in "Between the World and Me" were to speak to his son about Appiah's essay, perhaps reciting a passage, what might it be?

Write an essay in which you consider Appiah's argument from the point of view of Coates, the father, speaking to his son in "Between the World and Me."

2. Like Edward Said in "States" (p. 523), Ta-Nehisi Coates includes photographs in "Between the World and Me." (One image is included in our selection. You might look through a copy of the book *Between the World and Me* at your

library to see the others.) Both Said and Coates are trying to represent a world — present, past, and future — and both rely on visual images. Write an essay in which you consider the different uses of the photograph in these two selections. How do they function for you, as a reader? What do you imagine the authors had in mind when they selected these images and brought them into the text?

3. Both John Edgar Wideman in "Our Time" (p. 603) and Ta-Nehisi Coates in "Between the World and Me" can be seen as writing to understand the places in which they grew up and the ideas about the world and family that circulated in those places at those times. Wideman takes on this work by writing *about* his brother (sometimes in the voice of his brother), while Coates takes on this work by writing *to* his son. Write an essay in which you consider the following questions: What ideas, arguments, or approaches do Wideman and Coates have in common, despite more than thirty years between the publications of their books? What do their commonalities suggest to you? How does Wideman's writing about his brother make his work different from Coates's work, in which Coates is talking to his son? How might Coates's perspective address Wideman's concerns about getting to the truth of his brother's story?



JENNINE CAPÓ Crucet

Jennine Capó Crucet (b. 1981) is an acclaimed novelist and essayist. She is the author of the novel *Make Your Home Among Strangers* (2015), which won the International Latino Book Award for Best Latino-themed Fiction and was a *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice; the story collection *How to Leave Hialeah* (2009), winner of the Iowa Short Fiction Prize, the John Gardner Book Award, and the Devil's Kitchen Reading Award; and the story collection *My Time Among the Whites* (2019), from which this essay is taken. Her essays and short stories have appeared in the *New York Times*, *The Rumpus*, *Buzzfeed*, *The Miami Rail*, *Prairie Schooner*, and many other publications. Crucet is a first-generation college student who left Florida for Cornell University, much to her family's surprise. While mentoring first-generation students at a nonprofit, she was often asked, "What can I read to try to know what I'm about to be in for?" Recognizing a glaring absence in literature, Crucet offered these students some suggestions, eventually writing and publishing her own response in the form of her award-winning novel. That novel, *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, is Crucet's best answer to the students she mentored.

Much of Crucet's work revolves around the relationships between identity, place, and change. She tries to capture the complex feeling of leaving home in her writing, recognizing that "when you come back you have a kind of perspective that you didn't have before that in some way problematizes your relationship with your family. You just start to be able to have a sort of double vision about them and who they are and how you grew up that can be really painful." Crucet experiences this double vision between home and not home in her position as Associate Professor of English and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, an overwhelmingly white campus whose population is vastly different from her childhood neighborhood of Hialeah.

The selection included here is an essay in which Crucet grapples with her desire to be a conscious and informed educator in a wholly unfamiliar place. She wants to make something of this place that is distinctly not home, but discovers her own identities are in deep, and sometimes dangerous, conflict with rural Nebraskan culture. In "Going Cowboy," Crucet explores the terrain

and culture of the rural Midwest; she attempts to live inside (however temporarily) the rural ranching culture of the place, seeking understanding of the new context she is about to enter as a professor teaching in the state for the first time. This essay chronicles her experience at the ranch and raises important questions about identity, power, region, and perspective.

Going Cowboy

One of the first things I did when I moved to Nebraska from Florida was find myself some cows to herd. It seemed like a must when considering one of the state's claims to fame: there are over three times as many cows as there are people within its borders. I'd moved to the state to take a job at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, the state's capital and its second largest city, and learned before my time there officially began that roughly twenty-five percent of the incoming class would be first-generation college students. I had this in common with them, but there was a key difference: many of these first-gen students came from rural backgrounds, from families where work centered on cattle and corn. I'd grown up in Miami, had gone to a high school whose population rivaled that of some entire Nebraskan towns. With the last few weeks of summer ahead of me, I decided that to be better at my job, I needed to see the real Nebraska, whatever that meant.

I eventually found a website for a ranch in a town considered to be the rodeo capital of Nebraska. (*There's a rodeo capital?* I thought.) Aside from what seemed to be easy access to cattle, the ranch offered visitors a chance to stay for days or even weeks at a time and work from dawn until dusk, to experience what it's like to be, as their website put it, a *real Sandhill cowboy*. The website also promised that this was a real working cattle ranch; no spa day, no golf or yoga, it warned. I would be *driving the herd*, it said. "The Sandhills proves to guests there is a lot more to Nebraska than flat lands and cornfields!" I read in that exclamation point my defense of my own hometown: *There's more to Miami than South Beach!* I should expect to spend at least six hours a day on a horse; I would get my own horse for the duration of my time there. I'd never been on a horse for much longer than it took to take a picture of me on one.

Upon calling to confirm the trip, the woman on the phone – who ended up being the wife of the rancher, the whole enterprise of getting tourists to pay to work the ranch being mostly her idea – told me to be sure to bring a hat. "A cowboy hat with a stampede string would be best," she said. I wrote down *stampede string* to Google later and asked if a baseball cap would suffice. "The tops of your ears will burn," she said. "But if that's what you have, that's what you have." I told her I didn't sunburn easily because – and here I stuttered, covering up what I almost said with the phrase *because I'd grown up in Miami*. I'd been living in Nebraska for about two weeks, and it hit me at that moment in our conversation that with this new home state came very different demographics and assumptions: leading with the fact that I was Latina (which in Miami is all but assumed) might make my hosts a little less excited to meet me. Just as I'd

never spent time on a ranch around white folks, this woman had, more than likely, never meaningfully interacted with a “Latino Hispanic” – as Republican candidate Donald Trump would mistakenly come to call us during one of the presidential debates. This was the summer of 2015, and this call took place just days before Trump announced his run at the Republican nomination by slandering all Mexicans as rapists and murderers. It wasn’t until I caught myself trying to avoid mentioning my background and masking my Miami accent that I realized my ranch host might be afraid or suspicious of someone like me, feelings that the next year would only amplify – a year that taught me to be very afraid of my new white neighbors.

The woman laughed into the phone and said, “Well! I don’t think we’ve ever had someone from Miami come stay with us.” Her big, easy laughter scooted us right past any other questions about me. She gave me the heads up that there would be a film crew there for part of my stay. “Some French folks,” she said.

The French folks turned out to be four guys who never bothered to clarify their names to me. They were boy-bandish in nature; I thought of them as “The Leader,” “The Wanna-Be Leader” (he was the main character in the documentary), “The One with The Long Hair,” (their camera person) and “The Other One” (destined to be forgotten, his presence is blurry in every picture I took). They arrived at the ranch a few hours after I did and, strangely, by cab: they’d flagged one down at Omaha Airport and somehow convinced the cabbie to drive his minivan over two hundred miles to drop them off. Before the cabbie drove away – another two-hundred-mile return drive ahead of him – I ran up to his window, through the cloud of cigarette smoke the French guys had created within seconds of getting out of the cab, and asked him the fare. “Over five hundred bucks,” he said. “Those jerks didn’t even tip.”

They were at the ranch to film part of a documentary about completing an American-themed Bucket List for French Hipsters. They were doing everything American; they’d come to this ranch to be *real American cowboys*, they kept saying. And they wanted it all on tape. They’d flown into Omaha from Chicago, where they’d just completed another French-designated quintessential American Experience: going to a Cubs game and eating a deep-dish pizza.

They wanted to play cowboy but they came to Nebraska? I asked nobody. Prior to this trip, I hadn’t known there was a deep cowboy and rodeo culture in Nebraska. The Nebraska I imagined was just flat fields of corn – and that’s true for most of the parts you can see from I-80 – but I didn’t know that much of the state rolled with cattle-covered hills. The cowboy boots I’d seen on the feet of people in Lincoln were not, as I’d originally thought, some kind of quirky or subversive fashion statement; these people were legit. The mud wedged under the heels should’ve given that away, but I had my own assumptions about Nebraska, and none of them included cowboys. My own imagination placed all cowboys in one of two places: Texas or Wyoming. It hadn’t totally sunk in that Wyoming, a

state I'd grown up thinking was the definition of the middle of nowhere, was now right next door.

I'd shown up to the ranch wearing a pair of extremely clean and not-at-all broken in black leather boots, a pair I'd bought in Davie, Florida years earlier when my dad, after becoming an American citizen, dragged our family north of Miami for an afternoon to buy everyone real American cowboy boots. I'd owned the pair since I was fourteen and had worn them maybe twice; I wore them to the ranch thinking they would help me blend in right away – a kind of disguise, along with the plaid shirts I'd bought at a Lincoln thrift store for a quarter a piece the day before. The rancher noticed the boots immediately as I approached his barn and asked me why I was wearing ropers. Days later, I learned that ropers are a style of boot with a shorter heel than standard boots, typically worn not for long distance rides like the ones we'd be doing, but during rodeos, when a cowboy would need to slip in and out of a saddle more quickly than a standard boot heel allows. I'd looked down, lifted a foot off the ground as if the correct answer to his question were written on the bottom of my boot, and answered him by saying, I think these are just boots?

His mustache hid whatever his mouth did before he turned away.

I learned the next morning that I'd been assigned a horse named Katie, which I took as a good sign: I'd loathed a girl in college (for good reason!) by the same name, and here was the universe, giving me a chance to make amends. Both Katies were plain, dull-yellow blondes, nothing distinguishing them as memorable in appearance. The rancher assigned Katie to me in part because he (correctly) sensed that I was afraid of horses and she was their nicest, most mellow horse (the same cannot be said of College Katie). I was to brush her, feed her, get the saddle on and off her each day. The horse looked at me like she'd seen enough of my kind and was not looking forward to doing most of the heavy lifting in our relationship.

The French guys argued with the rancher over their horse assignment, wanting animals that would play into a certain narrative in their film and not the calm, admittedly unremarkable horses with which we'd all been matched. I can imagine these guys planning out this part of the film while still in Paris, smoking cigarettes and sitting around their third bottle of wine, dreaming of their version of the American West, each of them atop a sleek, wild beast looking exactly like the marbled, jumpy horses the rancher didn't dare trust us around, the ones still in the pen. I almost sympathized with them. The Wanna-be-Leader felt he'd been given a smallish horse on purpose and asked the rancher to reconsider, citing the horse would make him look silly and weak and "not like a tough man." I suspect the rancher knew this and that this was *exactly* why he'd assigned him that horse. When the rancher ignored him, he traded horses with the Leader, whose horse at least had some freaky blue eyes (the negotiation of this trade happening in whispered French). The rancher responded only by intentionally confusing the names of these two men the rest of the time they were there.

A thirteen-year-old girl who volunteered on the ranch was tasked with showing me how to put on (and later remove) Katie's saddle by myself. When she saw how nervous I was just to come up close enough to the horse's side to do this, she tried to make me feel better by telling me she'd been riding horses since before she learned to walk. I was impressed, but this revelation didn't make me feel any better. Not at all. It made me feel my foreignness more, despite, I think, her hope to do the opposite. This offered-up fact of her life seemed unimaginable to me – as unimaginable as the claims made by Nebraska students and new neighbors I'd later meet that they'd never seen the ocean in real life. I'd grown up going to the beach, a place some of them – when faced with the concept of the sheer vastness of the ocean – described as terrifying. As terrifying, probably, as the moment I first slid my foot into that saddle's stirrup.

After several days of herding, I had a strong sense that the rancher wasn't a huge fan of the French guys. (For good reason, as they often rode their horses very quickly in directions that he didn't want them to take, filming the unauthorized galloping and spooking cows along the way, which meant more hours of work for him). I wasn't much of a fan either, in part because they were showing me the ugly side of what I was really doing there: they were there to say they'd been there, to have it mean something about the kind of person they thought they were. They were there for the story of it – and I was doing the same thing, really, hiding behind the excuse that it would make me a more empathetic professor. Like them, I was using the relative foreignness and perceived exoticness of the rancher's day to day life as a form of entertainment, or perhaps edutainment, since I entered into it hoping to learn something I could take back with me and apply to my interactions with other Nebraskans. My curiosity about his world was not in and of itself a bad thing, but when the rancher joked over after-work ice tea and vodka that in this country, "Things certainly have changed. I met my wife at gun club," I snuck away and typed the exact phrase into my phone. I'd been doing that since I'd first arrived, my curiosity converting into a kind of touristy voyeurism as I documented things he or his wife said that revealed just how much distance there was between my version of America and theirs. Even if I'd convinced

myself I was coming from a place of sincere inquiry, I still harbored expectations, and the setting in which we'd found ourselves allowed for the kinds of quick, stereotypical judgements I was all too willing to catalogue every time the rancher fulfilled them. He had pointed to

my car from across a field minutes after I'd gotten there and asked me, with a sincerity I can only describe as Nebraskan, "What kind of car is that? A Prius? Who makes that car?" I was suddenly aware of how teal my car was. I'd answered, "Toyota?" He made no other response except to stare a few seconds longer and then walk away. From that distance, I could see my car as he saw it: a giant misplaced Easter egg from somewhere overseas.

**FROM THAT DISTANCE, I COULD
SEE MY CAR AS HE SAW IT: A GIANT
MISPLACED EASTER EGG FROM
SOMEWHERE OVERSEAS.**

Did the rancher see himself differently, either in that moment or later, because of the way I looked at him, with surprise and confusion at him not knowing which company manufactures the Prius, a car that – in the various American cities I’d lived in – was as unremarkable as Katie the Horse? I don’t think he experienced the same flash of self-awareness as I had, perhaps because he likely saw me as another tourist, not so different from the French guys – someone with enough free time and extra money (things I learned ranchers rarely have) to actually pay to work on his ranch. I can admit that if I were him, I’d have trouble taking people like me seriously. I could think my wife was a genius for coming up with a scheme like this while also quietly resenting her for the extra work these visitors sometimes made for me. No one had yet asked me what I did for a living, so no one knew I was about to be a professor at the big school a few hours southeast. If asked, I didn’t know if I would even answer with that fact. While true, it didn’t feel totally accurate, in part because I’ve always thought of myself as an accidental professor, someone who came into the job because of a whole other career as a writer. I suspect the rancher didn’t actually care what we did in real life; it had no bearing on his own, what time he had to be up or how many hours it would take to track down the herd’s bull – who was (and is) always alone – to make sure he looked healthy. When I joked that he should just track the bull via GPS, he didn’t grin or frown, and the neutral mouth behind his heavy mustache was worse than either because by then he’d assessed what I still hoped to prove wrong: that we would never, ever understand what the other’s life was really like, and worse, he’d decided long ago that there was little point in making the effort.

One morning, I snuck cookies from the previous night’s dinner into my saddlebag for that day’s ride: the six hours a day on a horse turned out to be a conservative estimate and I needed snacks. Cookies were a bad choice, though, because the chocolate in them melted in the heat and left my hands sticky, and also because the rancher took to calling me Cookie Monster once he caught me eating one while on my horse, yelling out, “Let’s go, Cookie Monster,” every time I’d lagged too far behind or got my horse in the wrong spot while trying to pen cows.

To shake off the Cookie Monster label, I tried to be on the rancher’s team when it came to dealing with the French film crew. Over dinner one night, Wanna-Be Leader tried to talk to us all about wine (there was no wine on the table; the rancher was strictly a spirits man, from what I could tell). I knew enough about wine to understand what he was talking about, but I kept that knowledge tucked away that night, instead turning to the rancher with a face that said, *Can you believe these fancy jerks?* The Frenchman then began talking about how us Americans ate turkey on the Fourth of July. “Why do you do this?” he asked, and even though I realized right away he was confused – he meant Thanksgiving – I kept my mouth shut.

One reason why the Frenchman was talking as much as he was might have been the fact that during every meal, from the minute we walked in,

the TV perched at the end of the dining table was on and permanently set to Fox News. The volume on low, no one really acknowledged that it was on, but it seemed to me that everyone at the table was watching and not watching, the hum of hatred unacknowledged even though we could all hear it. The Frenchman was trying to drown it out, which was more than what I was doing. After hearing the rancher go off about Mexicans getting free passes into the United States – I was, I learned in that moment, passing as white to him – I was too afraid to ask if we could perhaps change the channel.

The rancher's misinformed grievance about Hispanics (though non-Latinx people often label us all as Mexican, as if the terms are interchangeable) is one I hear often because,

as a light-skinned Latina, I often accidentally trespass into moments that are essentially displays of white power intended only for other whites. It wasn't until my first year of college, when I read Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* in a course, that I first recognized this trespassing as an act in which I had sometimes found

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myself but didn't yet know how to define: white people who misread me as also white sometimes display the kind of pervasive racism usually reserved for white-only spaces. They inadvertently include me in these white power moments, moments that we aren't supposed to witness and which are perpetrated by the kind of well-meaning white folks – people who genuinely don't consider themselves racists – when they're sure we aren't around to hear them. I once walked out of a spin class at a Lincoln gym because, in the darkness of the room, the trainer (almost correctly) assumed everyone in the room was white, and she'd begun the class by shouting her excitement that we were now *on the road to making America great again*: this was the day after the 2016 election.

Larsen's *Passing* also taught me, at age eighteen and living outside of Miami for the first time in my life, that passing for white was something one could do *on purpose*. Years later, I'd find myself in Lincoln doing just that while looking at apartments, but only after having flat-ironed my coarse, curly hair and wearing my glasses instead of contact lenses, to hide, I guess, behind the frames. I'd told myself I was just trying to look professional, but I knew a euphemism when I heard it. Here is the ugly truth: I didn't want to miss out on a good apartment because of someone's ignorance, and that meant doing what I could to look more white. On a walk-through of the place I eventually rented, the young white woman showing me around complained out of nowhere that the previous tenant's food was *really smelly*, saying, "He was Indian, so . . . you know." I said only, "Indian food is delicious," which meant: please continue to think I'm white and therefore as complicit in your racism, because I really want this apartment. It was a stance I could take in part because of my light

skin and the privileges it affords. This same light skin was keeping me safe at the rancher's table – a protection I was afraid to voluntarily give up once he'd made it clear how much he hated people like me. But in not giving up that protection, I was helping him perpetuate his ignorance by choosing instead to ensure my own safety.

Which is another word for comfort. Meaning: something I could afford to relinquish, something we much in fact relinquish, if we have any hope of changing each other's minds.

I did not have the privilege of knowing which of those two words would prove more accurate.

The irony in the rancher's anger about Mexican immigrants getting free passes for citizenship – an anger that is based on falsity spread through the propaganda he consumed along with every meal – is that there is a Latino group that, at the time, did benefit from that kind of special treatment. That privilege, which could be described as a free pass to citizenship, had been extended (for many years and for many complex reasons) to Cubans. Meaning, to my parents. The rancher had no idea that the manifestation of one of his greatest fears – the American-born child of these immigrants who were taking everything, everything – was sitting at his dinner table. That she'd been hired, in fact, by the public university whose football team he followed as closely as his religion. Look at me, taking their jobs. From his perspective, by just sitting there, I was proving his point. And yes, I may have literally paid him for that seat, but didn't my soon-to-be salary come from his own tax dollars? Lord, if he only knew what was right there in front of him. He had no clue how right and how wrong he was.

I now look back on the trip and can't believe I went up there alone in the first place. If I hadn't been raised in Miami and thus tacitly taught to consider myself as a kind of white, I would've known to question my safety earlier. "I don't think we've ever had anyone from Miami come stay with us," the rancher's wife told me when I'd called, and it wasn't until I was driving back to Lincoln that I thought: If I were any darker, I would've learned a long time ago that the safest move is to avoid the kinds of people I just left behind.

There is no way I would make this trip now. I'm too scared to head into the rural parts of Nebraska, where I'm not sure I count as American despite being born here. More than that, in the time since the election, I've lost the desire to know what life is like for a certain type of Nebraskan, a certain kind of American. And that's the scariest part of this story, learned in the aftermath of the trip: I'm as ready to make judgements about them as they did about people like me when they voted for the Republican candidate. The night of the election, after the race was called, a group of ten or so young white men wearing American flags as capes marched down the street in front of my apartment building, a main drag in Lincoln, cheering and chanting "Lock her up!" It was almost 2am. Their yelling

woke me up. In my half-sleep, I heard the phrase a new way: the “her” they meant was me. I thought of the rancher, how his complaints about Mexicans were really about policies that applied only to Cubans, how I left that fact unacknowledged out of fear – I thought about how these boys could be his sons, and I felt grateful that I’d kept my mouth shut, that I’d left the ranch without any confrontation. The phrase I thought was, *I left in time*. I wondered how much longer my light skin would keep me hidden from them.

AND THAT’S THE SCARIEST PART OF THIS STORY, LEARNED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE TRIP: I’M AS READY TO MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT THEM AS THEY DID ABOUT PEOPLE LIKE ME.

The rancher had only one thumb, the result of having swung a bad dale with a lasso. “The speed and heat from the rope take it clean off,” another ranch guest – this one a regular from Colorado who came back season after season for a work-vacation – explained to me. “You see a lot of old rodeo guys without thumbs,” he said.

I never acknowledged the rancher’s missing thumb, or that the word “dale” (pronounced, DAH-lee) is taken from the Spanish word the Mexican cowboys – vaqueros – yelled as they tossed their lassos. It’s a skill American cowboys took from them. I looked all this up once I was back in Lincoln because hearing this Nebraskan saying “Dale!” as if singing along to Pitbull’s latest made me think there had to be a connection between the words. I wanted there to be one; I wanted desperately to link these things – to show how history and language could work together to lead this Sandhill cowboy to yell a stolen Spanish word every day of his life without even knowing he was doing so. I wanted to find the right detail, make the right discovery that would open up his heart and make our lives seem less foreign to one another. Or, if that seems more and more impossible with each passing day – as he chose to keep FoxNews on at the dinner table, signaling to anyone there what kind of America he believes in – at least it could open up someone else’s heart, perhaps yours.

I don’t know if the rancher knows the origin of this word, of how it ended up in his mouth. The connection might seem to him as strange as finding a French film crew playing cowboy on his ranch for a few days. Or as upsetting as realizing that a few days on a cattle ranch will actually teach you very little about the lives of many of the people you are about to encounter. Or it might be as jarring as something I felt on my last day there: sitting on a horse, my eyes closed, the Nebraska wind rolling over the Sandhills and thrashing miles and miles of waist-high grasses and sounding exactly like the relentless wash of waves against the shore in Miami. There was no denying it. There was no drowning it out.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Midway through this essay, Crucet writes, "I snuck away and typed that exact phrase into my phone. I'd been doing that since I first arrived, documenting things he [the rancher] or his wife said that revealed just how much distance there was between my version of America and theirs" (p. 261). In this moment, Crucet pulls back the curtain for readers, showing a glimpse of her writerly recording process within the product of the essay itself. In what ways does this recording of personal experience also function as research? How might you describe the kind of research Crucet is doing?
2. Spend some time reflecting on the form of this essay. It seems to lack true transitions, instead physically separating one scene from another. Why do you think Crucet chose this kind of juxtaposition of vignettes over using conventional linking language to connect her narrative? Often writers who deploy personal narrative to move us to think carefully about difficult issues take this approach. They leave each small piece of a scene or story there before us to think about and then move on to the next. We, as readers, have to do the actual thinking and make the actual connections. There are gaps between ideas in this essay where you, as the reader, are expected to do some heavy cognitive lifting. How might you describe the work you have to do in order to link one scene to the next and think about the ideas that Crucet seems to want you to think about?
3. Crucet locates her essay in a single physical space — the ranch she works in the "rodeo capital" of Nebraska. She makes it clear, however, that this space is not *her* space. We find evidence of this in details she offers like these: she's from Miami, she's wearing the wrong kind of cowboy boots, and she's too afraid to ask the rancher to turn off Fox News. Where, in this essay, can you point to Crucet's attempts at belonging or understanding, despite the evidence she offers that her space is far from rural Nebraska? How does Crucet's identity seem to make her feel unsafe? How does she deal with this lack of safety?
4. Much of Crucet's essay is oriented around points of difference. Of the rancher, she writes, "we would never, ever understand what the other's life was really like, and worse, he'd decided long ago that there was little point to even making the effort" (p. 262). By the piece's conclusion, however, Crucet compares the feeling and sound of Nebraska's wind to the chaos of Miami's crashing ocean. Reread this piece, looking for as many points of difference as possible, whether they be between character traits, identities, place, or something else. Then, do the harder, more subtle work of looking for points of similarity. These connections might be implicit rather than explicit. Are there ways Nebraska and Florida are connected? What about Crucet and the rancher, or his wife? How do the cab driver and the French film crew weave their way into this story? To what places and to whom do they belong?

Compare your notes listing points of connection and difference. What does it say about the essay's effectiveness if there are more moments of difference than connection, or vice versa? Consider rereading the essay again: do you still see the same points of difference and similarity, or have yet further moments surfaced? Does the essay tend toward difference or similarity, or does it strike an equilibrium? What are the implications of the balance (or lack thereof) that it strikes?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Most readers might experience Crucet's essay as narrative, as a personal story about a personal experience she had in exploring a new place for the first time. But the piece is, of course, about much more than that. In fact, we might also read the essay as making several important arguments (some more explicit than others) about issues of gender, race, politics, and history. For this essay, we want you to decide what you think is Crucet's most important argument in this piece. Write an essay in which you identify (using specific moments in the text) Crucet's most poignant or essential argument. What is she trying to persuade us about? How does she enact that persuasion? Why might Crucet have chosen the narrative essay to communicate this argument as opposed to a more conventional and linear persuasive essay? What about Crucet's storytelling style and craft make the argument powerful, visible, and interesting? Or, in the case where you think the argument is more implicit, how might you help a reader to *see* its power in the essay?

2. In the first "Question for a Second Reading," we invite you to think about Crucet's writerly practice of notetaking and observation as a kind of research. Often when we imagine research, we might think of secondary sources, libraries, or archives, of moments when writers are turning to other sources to make their arguments and raise their central questions. But of course, listening to the language of others is quite similar to reading; carefully observing one's surroundings employs similar skills to engaging with a museum exhibition or studying a piece of artwork. In this sense, we can imagine Crucet as a careful researcher, someone who is, at once, both a student and critic of her research material.

For this writing assignment, we invite you to take on a project like Crucet's, to be the kind of researcher she is. Begin by going to a place you have not been, which means seeing places you would not otherwise see and meeting people you will not have met before. Like Crucet, you should think of going to a place that you believe will help you understand the lives of others and your own life more fully. In other words, you should have an investment in learning and observing while you are there. And like Crucet, you should also pay attention to yourself (your feelings, questions, thoughts)

as you are observing. Write an essay in which you recount this new experience in such a way that inspires your reader to ask crucial questions about you, about the environment you observe, about history, and about society more broadly.

3. Crucet writes, "With the last few weeks of summer ahead of me, I decided that to be better at my job, I need to see *the real Nebraska*, whatever that meant" (p. 258). In her opening paragraph, Crucet explains her thinking about her students — about the ways she might be able to understand them, and the ways she might not. She sets out on a quest to learn about the students she might encounter in this new place. You might find this particularly interesting because you are a student yourself, despite possibly being in a different location from Crucet or her students.

Write an essay in which you consider your own position as a student reading about a professor who is trying to understand her students. How does Crucet's essay complicate or lead you to wonder about the ways your teachers think (or do not think) about you as a student? What, from your perspective, is Crucet trying to discover at the ranch? How is her trip a failure, a success, or something else entirely? Finally, what arguments might you make about the ways you think educators should come to know their students? What might make that knowing possible (or impossible, for that matter)?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. In the closing to "Arts of the Contact Zone" (p. 454), Mary Louise Pratt describes the arts of the contact zone as:

exercises in story-telling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. (p. 456)

Of course, Pratt's essay was written decades before Crucet's "Going Cowboy." But one interesting way to read Pratt's comments here is to imagine them as a lens through which to examine Crucet's work. Write an essay in which you discuss Crucet's essay as a possible example of the "arts of the contact zone." You might begin by summarizing Pratt's comments above, highlighting the

most important terms and phrases for your work in understanding Crucet's essay in light of Pratt's. What might Pratt have to say about Crucet's essay? How do you see "Going Cowboy" as exemplifying/extending/challenging Pratt's ideas about "contact zones"? What might Crucet herself have to say to Pratt?

2. One might argue that Crucet's "Going Cowboy" is an essay about power — about who has power in what kinds of contexts, about the ways race, gender, and class are linked to power, about the power human beings assert in attempts at describing and/or understanding one another. Of course, Crucet's essay is one of many essays in this book that consider ideas about power as central to their arguments and narratives: Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Gloria Anzaldúa, Susan Griffin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Scaachi Koul, and Edward Said all could be said to be writers with deep concerns about how power is enacted and imagined in contemporary culture.

Butler puts it this way: "to live is to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future" (p. 199). Write an essay in which you consider one or more of the above author's ideas about power and how those ideas might connect to Crucet's "Going Cowboy." How can the essays you've chosen to discuss shed light upon one another? How might they support, enrich, or undercut one another's arguments? And why do you suppose questions of power are on the mind of these particular authors in their particular moments of composition?

3. One way to imagine Crucet's "Going Cowboy" is as an act of witnessing, an act of looking in on another way of life from one's own position. Ruth Behar is also concerned with this question of witnessing. She writes of anthropology as "the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing" (p. 111). The problem, though, as Behar goes on to explain, is figuring out how to convey that experience of witnessing after the witnessed event has occurred. Behar describes that problem, explaining that "An anthropologist's conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense" (p. 112).

Crucet's "Going Cowboy" and Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature" (p. 436) can also be read as essays about the problems of witnessing and representation. Write an essay which compares how these three authors approach witnessing and representation. How do they understand these acts and the problems they present in fundamentally different ways? How do they see the effects of previous knowledge and subjective experiences? In what ways are their approaches to recovery from these problems similar and different? And how might the subjects that each of these writers are exploring shape their attitudes?



W. E. B. Du Bois

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868–1963) stands among the most widely read and admired and the most prolific and influential writers of our nation. He was a historian and sociologist, a journalist and political activist, a novelist and playwright. He was the founder and editor of *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the author of over two dozen books. He wrote on virtually every aspect of American political, social, and economic life.

In a tribute on the anniversary of Du Bois's one hundredth birthday, Martin Luther King Jr. said:

Dr. Du Bois was a man possessed of priceless dedication to his people. The vast accumulation of achievement and public recognition were not for him pathways to personal affluence and a diffusion of identity. Whatever else he was, with his multitude of careers and professional titles, he was first and always a Black man. He used his richness of talent as a trust for his people. He saw that Negroes were robbed of so many things decisive to their existence that the theft of their history seemed only a small part of their losses. But Dr. Du Bois knew that to lose one's history is to lose one's self-understanding and with it the roots for pride. This drove him to become a historian of Negro life, and the combination of his unique zeal and intellect rescued for all of us a heritage whose loss would have profoundly impoverished us.

W. E. B. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts. As a child he attended predominantly white schools and churches. It was there, he wrote, that he first felt the peculiar experience of being "a problem" by being black. Reflecting on a moment of discrimination at school, he wrote, "It dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil." The immediate effect on the young Du Bois was a deep determination to succeed "by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in [his] head, — some way." He grew up, however, with the peculiar sensation of "double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self

through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

In 1885 he left the North to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. It was there that he first became immersed in the life and culture of black Americans. For two summers, he taught school in a small black community near Alexandria, Tennessee, and began a lifelong interest in African American folk songs and spirituals. From Fisk, Du Bois went to Harvard University, then to the University of Berlin. He received his PhD in history from Harvard in 1895, becoming the first black American to receive a Harvard PhD. In 1896, Du Bois published his dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States*.

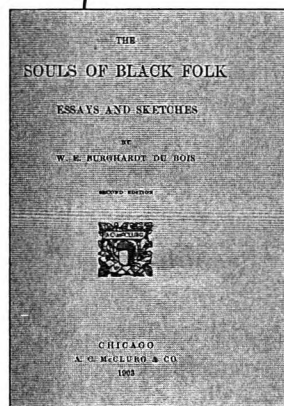
Du Bois's first teaching position was at Wilberforce University in Ohio, and his next book was a sociological study of the African American community in Philadelphia, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899). By this time Du Bois had begun to write as a journalist and essayist in magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Dial*, *The New World*, the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, and *World's Work*, speaking for the experience of black Americans and speaking against racial violence and segregation. All this was in preparation for his most influential work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk* is a mixture of reverie and history, prophecy and autobiography. It is an eloquent and unconventional work of writing designed to introduce both black and white readers to the distinctive history and heritage of black America, its culture, religion, values, and forms of expression.

Perhaps the best way to introduce the project of the book and the selection that follows, is to reproduce a section of Du Bois's introduction, called "The Forethought." In it he describes the outline and intent of his book and introduces the metaphor of the "Veil," a figure of speech that comes to represent the forces of mind, politics, and economy that divide black from white Americans. He ends with a reference to the "Sorrow Songs," his term for the spirituals created and sung by African American slaves:

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.

I pray you, then, receive my little book in all charity, studying my words with me, forgiving mistake and foible for sake of the faith and passion that is in me, and seeking the grain of truth hidden there.

I have sought to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand Americans live and strive. First, in two chapters I have tried to show what Emancipation meant to them, and what was its aftermath. In a third chapter I have pointed out the slow rise of personal leadership, and criticised candidly the leader who bears the chief burden of his race today [Booker T. Washington].



Then, in two other chapters I have sketched in swift outline the two worlds within and without the Veil, and thus have come to the central problem of training men for life. Venturing now into deeper detail, I have in two chapters studied the struggles of the massed millions of the black peasantry, and in another have sought to make clear the present relations of the sons of master and man.

Leaving, then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls. . . .

Before each chapter, as now printed, stands a bar from the Sorrow Songs,—some echo of haunting melody from the only American music which welled up from black souls in the dark past. And, finally, need I add that I who speak here am bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of them that live within the Veil?

—OMAR KHAYYÁM (FITZGERALD)



And last of all there trickles down that third and darker thought, — the thought of the things themselves, the confused, half-conscious mutter of men who are black and whitened, crying "Liberty, Freedom, Opportunity — vouchsafe to us, O boastful World, the chance of living men!" To be sure,

behind the thought lurks the afterthought, — suppose, after all, the World is right and we are less than men? Suppose this mad impulse within is all wrong, some mock mirage from the untrue?

So here we stand among thoughts of human unity, even through conquest and slavery; the inferiority of black men, even if forced by fraud; a shriek in the night for the freedom of men who themselves are not yet sure of their right to demand it. This is the tangle of thought and afterthought wherein we are called to solve the problem of training men for life.

Behind all its curiousness, so attractive alike to sage and *dilettante*, lie its dim dangers, throwing across us shadows at once grotesque and awful. Plain it is to us that what the world seeks through desert and wild we

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have within our threshold, — a stalwart laboring force, suited to the semi-tropics; if, deaf to the voice of the *Zeitgeist*, we refuse to use and develop these men, we risk poverty and loss. If, on the other hand, seized by the brutal afterthought, we debauch the race thus caught in our talons, selfishly sucking their blood and brains in the future as in the past, what shall save us from national deca-

dence? Only that saner selfishness, which Education teaches men, can find the rights of all in the whirl of work.

Again, we may decry the color-prejudice of the South, yet it remains a heavy fact. Such curious kinks of the human mind exist and must be reckoned with soberly. They cannot be laughed away, nor always successfully stormed at, nor easily abolished by act of legislature. And yet they must not be encouraged by being let alone. They must be recognized as facts, but unpleasant facts; things that stand in the way of civilization and religion and common decency. They can be met in but one way, — by the breadth and broadening of human reason, by catholicity of taste and culture. And so, too, the native ambition and aspiration of men, even though they be black, backward, and ungraceful, must not lightly be dealt with. To stimulate wildly weak and untrained minds is to play with mighty fires; to flout their striving idly is to welcome a harvest of brutish crime and shameless lethargy in our very laps. The guiding of thought and the deft coordination of deed is at once the path of honor and humanity.

And so, in this great question of reconciling three vast and partially contradictory streams of thought, the one panacea of Education leaps to the lips of all: — such human training as will best use the labor of all men without enslaving or brutalizing; such training as will give us poise to encourage the prejudices that bulwark society, and to stamp out those that in sheer barbarity deafen us to the wail of prisoned souls within the Veil, and the mounting fury of shackled men.

But when we have vaguely said that Education will set this tangle straight, what have we uttered but a truism? Training for life teaches living; but what training for the profitable living together of black men and white? A hundred and fifty years ago our task would have seemed

easier. Then Dr. Johnson blandly assured us that education was needful solely for the embellishments of life, and was useless for ordinary vermin. To-day we have climbed to heights where we would open at least the outer courts of knowledge to all, display its treasures to many, and select the few to whom its mystery of Truth is revealed, not wholly by birth or the accidents of the stock market, but at least in part according to deftness and aim, talent and character. This programme, however, we are sorely puzzled in carrying out through that part of the land where the blight of slavery fell hardest, and where we are dealing with two backward peoples. To make here in human education that ever necessary combination of the permanent and the contingent — of the ideal and the practical in workable equilibrium — has been there, as it ever must be in every age and place, a matter of infinite experiment and frequent mistakes.

In rough approximation we may point out four varying decades of work in Southern education since the Civil War. From the close of the war until 1876, was the period of uncertain groping and temporary relief. There were army schools, mission schools, and schools of the Freedman's Bureau in chaotic disarrangement seeking system and coöperation. Then followed ten years of constructive definite effort toward the building of complete school systems in the South. Normal schools and colleges were founded for the freedmen, and teachers trained there to man the public schools. There was the inevitable tendency of war to underestimate the prejudices of the master and the ignorance of the slave, and all seemed clear sailing out of the wreckage of the storm. Meantime, starting in this decade yet especially developing from 1885 to 1895, began the industrial revolution of the South. The land saw glimpses of a new destiny and the stirring of new ideals. The educational system striving to complete itself saw new obstacles and a field of work ever broader and deeper. The Negro colleges, hurriedly founded, were inadequately equipped, illogically distributed, and of varying efficiency and grade; the normal and high schools were doing little more than common-school work, and the common schools were training but a third of the children who ought to be in them, and training these too often poorly. At the same time the white South, by reason of its sudden conversion from the slavery ideal, by so much the more became set and strengthened in its racial prejudice, and crystallized it into harsh law and harsher custom; while the marvellous pushing forward of the poor white daily threatened to take even bread and butter from the mouths of the heavily handicapped sons of the freedmen. In the midst, then, of the larger problem of Negro education sprang up the more practical question of work, the inevitable economic quandary that faces a people in the transition from slavery to freedom, and especially those who make that change amid hate and prejudice, lawlessness and ruthless competition.

The industrial school springing to notice in this decade, but coming to full recognition in the decade beginning with 1895, was the proffered answer to this combined educational and economic crisis, and an answer of singular wisdom and timeliness. From the very first in nearly all the

schools some attention had been given to training in handiwork, but now was this training first raised to a dignity that brought it in direct touch with the South's magnificent industrial development, and given an emphasis which reminded black folk that before the Temple of Knowledge swing the Gates of Toil.

Yet after all they are but gates, and when turning our eyes from the temporary and the contingent in the Negro problem to the broader question of the permanent uplifting and civilization of black men in America, we have a right to inquire, as this enthusiasm for material advancement mounts to its height, if after all the industrial school is the final and sufficient answer in the training of the Negro race; and to ask gently, but in all sincerity, the ever-recurring query of the ages, Is not life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? And men ask this to-day all the more eagerly because of sinister signs in recent educational movements. The tendency is here, born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends. Race-prejudices, which keep brown and black men in their "places," we are coming to regard as useful allies with such a theory, no matter how much they may dull the ambition and sicken the hearts of struggling human beings. And above all, we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than breadwinning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black.

Especially has criticism been directed against the former educational efforts to aid the Negro. In the four periods I have mentioned, we find first, boundless, planless enthusiasm and sacrifice; then the preparation

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of teachers for a vast public-school system; then the launching and expansion of that school system amid increasing difficulties; and finally the training of workmen for the new and growing industries. This development has been sharply ridiculed as a logical anomaly and flat reversal of nature. Soothly we have been told that first industrial and manual training should have taught the Negro to work, then simple schools should have taught him to read and write, and finally, after years, high and normal schools could have completed the system, as intelligence and wealth demanded.

That a system logically so complete was historically impossible, it needs but a little thought to prove. Progress in human affairs is more often a pull than a push, surging forward of the exceptional man, and the lifting of his duller brethren slowly and painfully to his vantage-ground. Thus it was no accident that gave birth to universities centuries before the common schools, that made fair Harvard the first flower of our wilderness. So in the South: the mass of the freedmen at the end of the war

lacked the intelligence so necessary to modern workingmen. They must first have the common school to teach them to read, write, and cipher; and they must have higher schools to teach teachers for the common schools. The white teachers who flocked South went to establish such a common-school system. Few held the idea of founding colleges; most of them at first would have laughed at the idea. But they faced, as all men since them have faced, that central paradox of the South, — the social separation of the races. At that time it was the sudden volcanic rupture of nearly all relations between black and white, in work and government and family life. Since then a new adjustment of relations in economic and political affairs has grown up, — an adjustment subtle and difficult to grasp, yet singularly ingenious, which leaves still that frightful chasm at the color-line across which men pass at their peril. Thus, then and now, there stand in the South two separate worlds; and separate not simply in the higher realms of social intercourse, but also in church and school, on railway and street-car, in hotels and theatres, in streets and city sections, in books and newspapers, in asylums and jails, in hospitals and graveyards. There is still enough of contact for large economic and group coöperation, but the separation is so thorough and deep that it absolutely precludes for the present between the races anything like that sympathetic and effective group-training and leadership of the one by the other, such as the American Negro and all backward peoples must have for effectual progress.

This the missionaries of '68 soon saw; and if effective industrial and trade schools were impracticable before the establishment of a common-school system, just as certainly no adequate common schools could be founded until there were teachers to teach them. Southern whites would not teach them; Northern whites in sufficient numbers could not be had. If the Negro was to learn, he must teach himself, and the most effective help that could be given him was the establishment of schools to train Negro teachers. This conclusion was slowly but surely reached by every student of the situation until simultaneously, in widely separated regions, without consultation or systematic plan, there arose a series of institutions designed to furnish teachers for the untaught. Above the sneers of critics at the obvious defects of this procedure must ever stand its one crushing rejoinder: in a single generation they put thirty thousand black teachers in the South; they wiped out the illiteracy of the majority of the black people of the land, and they made Tuskegee possible.

Such higher training-schools tended naturally to deepen broader development: at first they were common and grammar schools, then some became high schools. And finally, by 1900, some thirty-four had one year or more of studies of college grade. This development was reached with different degrees of speed in different institutions: Hampton is still a high school, while Fisk University started her college in 1871, and Spelman Seminary about 1896. In all cases the aim was identical, — to maintain the standards of the lower training by giving teachers and leaders the best practicable training; and above all, to furnish the black world with

adequate standards of human culture and lofty ideals of life. It was not enough that the teachers of teachers should be trained in technical normal methods; they must also, so far as possible, be broad-minded, cultured men and women, to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of letters, but of life itself.

It can thus be seen that the work of education in the South began with higher institutions of training, which threw off as their foliage common schools, and later industrial schools, and at the same time strove to shoot their roots ever deeper toward college and university training. That this was an inevitable and necessary development, sooner or later, goes without saying; but there has been, and still is, a question in many minds if the natural growth was not forced, and if the higher training was not either overdone or done with cheap and unsound methods. Among white Southerners this feeling is widespread and positive. A prominent Southern journal voiced this in a recent editorial.

The experiment that has been made to give the colored students classical training has not been satisfactory. Even though many were able to pursue the course, most of them did so in a parrot-like way, learning what was taught, but not seeming to appropriate the truth and import of their instruction, and graduating without sensible aim or valuable occupation for their future. The whole scheme has proved a waste of time, efforts, and the money of the state.

While most fair-minded men would recognize this as extreme and overdrawn, still without doubt many are asking, Are there a sufficient number of Negroes ready for college training to warrant the undertaking? Are not too many students prematurely forced into this work? Does it not have the effect of dissatisfying the young Negro with his environment? And do these graduates succeed in real life? Such natural questions cannot be evaded, nor on the other hand must a Nation naturally skeptical as to Negro ability assume an unfavorable answer without careful inquiry and patient openness to conviction. We must not forget that most Americans answer all queries regarding the Negro *a priori*, and that the least that human courtesy can do is to listen to evidence.

The advocates of the higher education of the Negro would be the last to deny the incompleteness and glaring defects of the present system: too many institutions have attempted to do college work, the work in some cases has not been thoroughly done, and quantity rather than quality has sometimes been sought. But all this can be said of higher education throughout the land; it is the almost inevitable incident of educational growth, and leaves the deeper question of the legitimate demand for the higher training of Negroes untouched. And this latter question can be settled in but one way, — by a first-hand study of the facts. If we leave out of view all institutions which have not actually graduated students from a course higher than that of a New England high school, even though they be called colleges; if then we take the thirty-four remaining institutions, we may clear up many misapprehensions by asking searchingly, What

kind of institutions are they? what do they teach? and what sort of men do they graduate?

And first we may say that this type of college, including Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard, Wilberforce and Lincoln, Biddle, Shaw, and the rest, is peculiar, almost unique. Through the shining trees that whisper before me as I write, I catch glimpses of a boulder of New England granite, covering a grave, which graduates of Atlanta University have placed there, with this inscription:

IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF THEIR
FORMER TEACHER AND FRIEND
AND OF THE UNSELFISH LIFE HE
LIVED, AND THE NOBLE WORK HE
WROUGHT; THAT THEY, THEIR
CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILD-
DREN'S CHILDREN MIGHT BE
BLESSED.

This was the gift of New England to the freed Negro: not alms, but a friend; not cash, but character. It was not and is not money these seething millions want, but love and sympathy, the pulse of hearts beating with red blood; — a gift which to-day only their own kindred and race can bring to the masses, but which once saintly souls brought to their favored children in the crusade of the sixties, that finest thing in American history, and one of the few things untainted by sordid greed and cheap vain-glory. The teachers in these institutions came not to keep the Negroes in their place, but to raise them out of the defilement of the places where slavery had wallowed them. The colleges they founded were social settlements; homes where the best of the sons of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England. They lived and ate together, studied and worked, hoped and harkened in the dawning light. In actual formal content their curriculum was doubtless old-fashioned, but in educational power it was supreme, for it was the contact of living souls.

From such schools about two thousand Negroes have gone forth with the bachelor's degree. The number in itself is enough to put at rest the argument that too large a proportion of Negroes are receiving higher training. If the ratio to population of all Negro students throughout the land, in both college and secondary training, be counted, Commissioner Harris assures us "it must be increased to five times its present average" to equal the average of the land.

Fifty years ago the ability of Negro students in any appreciable numbers to master a modern college course would have been difficult to prove. To-day it is proved by the fact that four hundred Negroes, many of whom have been reported as brilliant students, have received the bachelor's degree from Harvard, Yale, Oberlin, and seventy other leading colleges. Here we have, then, nearly twenty-five hundred Negro graduates, of whom the crucial query must be made, How far did their training fit them

for life? It is of course extremely difficult to collect satisfactory data on such a point, — difficult to reach the men, to get trustworthy testimony, and to gauge that testimony by any generally acceptable criterion of success. In 1900, the Conference at Atlanta University undertook to study these graduates, and published the results. First they sought to know what these graduates were doing, and succeeded in getting answers from nearly two-thirds of the living. The direct testimony was in almost all cases corroborated by the reports of the colleges where they graduated, so that in the main the reports were worthy of credence. Fifty-three per cent of these graduates were teachers, — presidents of institutions, heads of normal schools, principals of city school-systems, and the like. Seventeen per cent were clergymen; another seventeen per cent were in the professions, chiefly as physicians. Over six per cent were merchants, farmers, and artisans, and four per cent were in the government civil-service. Granting even that a considerable proportion of the third unheard from are unsuccessful, this is a record of usefulness. Personally I know many hundreds of these graduates, and have corresponded with more than a thousand; through others I have followed carefully the life-work of scores; I have taught some of them and some of the pupils whom they have taught, lived in homes which they have builded, and looked at life through their eyes. Comparing them as a class with my fellow students in New England and in Europe, I cannot hesitate in saying that nowhere have I met men and women with a broader spirit of helpfulness, with deeper devotion to their life-work, or with more consecrated determination to succeed in the face of bitter difficulties than among Negro college-bred men. They have, to be sure, their proportion of ne'er-do-weels, their pedants and lettered fools, but they have a surprisingly small proportion of them; they have not that culture of manner which we instinctively associate with university men, forgetting that in reality it is the heritage from cultured homes, and that no people a generation removed from slavery can escape a certain unpleasant rawness and *gaucherie*, despite the best of training.

With all their larger vision and deeper sensibility, these men have usually been conservative, careful leaders. They have seldom been agitators, have withstood the temptation to head the mob, and have worked steadily and faithfully in a thousand communities in the South. As teachers, they have given the South a commendable system of city schools and large numbers of private normal-schools and academies. Colored college-bred men have worked side by side with white college graduates at Hampton; almost from the beginning the backbone of Tuskegee's teaching force has been formed of graduates from Fisk and Atlanta. And to-day the institute is filled with college graduates, from the energetic wife of the principal down to the teacher of agriculture, including nearly half of the executive council and a majority of the heads of departments. In the professions, college men are slowly but surely leavening the Negro church, are healing and preventing the devastations of disease, and beginning to furnish legal protection for the liberty and property of the toiling masses. All this is needful work. Who would do it if Negroes did not? How could

Negroes do it if they were not trained carefully for it? If white people need colleges to furnish teachers, ministers, lawyers, and doctors, do black people need nothing of the sort?

If it is true that there are an appreciable number of Negro youth in the land capable by character and talent to receive that higher training, the end of which is culture, and if the two and a half thousand who have had something of this training in the

**SUCH TRANSFORMATION
CALLS FOR SINGULAR WISDOM
AND PATIENCE.**

past have in the main proved themselves useful to their race and generation, the question then comes, What place in the future development of the South ought the Negro college and college-bred man to occupy? That the present social separation and acute race-sensitiveness must eventually yield to the influences of culture, as the South grows civilized, is clear. But such transformation calls for singular wisdom and patience. If, while the healing of this vast sore is progressing, the races are to live for many years side by side, united in economic effort, obeying a common government, sensitive to mutual thought and feeling, yet subtly and silently separate in many matters of deeper human intimacy, — if this unusual and dangerous development is to progress amid peace and order, mutual respect and growing intelligence, it will call for social surgery at once the delicatest and nicest in modern history. It will demand broad-minded, upright men, both white and black, and in its final accomplishment American civilization will triumph. So far as white men are concerned, this fact is to-day being recognized in the South, and a happy renaissance of university education seems imminent. But the very voices that cry hail to this good work are, strange to relate, largely silent or antagonistic to the higher education of the Negro.

Strange to relate! for this is certain, no secure civilization can be built in the South with the Negro as an ignorant, turbulent proletariat. Suppose we seek to remedy this by making them laborers and nothing more: they are not fools, they have tasted of the Tree of Life, and they will not cease to think, will not cease attempting to read the riddle of the world. By taking away their best equipped teachers and leaders, by slamming the door of opportunity in the faces of their bolder and brighter minds, will you make them satisfied with their lot? or will you not rather transfer their leading from the hands of men taught to think to the hands of untrained demagogues? We ought not to forget that despite the pressure of poverty, and despite the active discouragement and even ridicule of friends, the demand for higher training steadily increases among Negro youth: there were, in the years from 1875 to 1880, 22 Negro graduates from Northern colleges; from 1885 to 1890 there were 43, and from 1895 to 1900, nearly 100 graduates. From Southern Negro colleges there were, in the same three periods, 143, 413, and over 500 graduates. Here, then, is the plain thirst for training; by refusing to give this Talented Tenth the key to knowledge, can any sane man imagine that they will lightly lay aside their yearning and contentedly become hewers of wood and drawers of water?

No. The dangerously clear logic of the Negro's position will more and more loudly assert itself in that day when increasing wealth and more intricate social organization preclude the South from being, as it so largely is, simply an armed camp for intimidating black folk. Such waste of energy cannot be spared if the South is to catch up with civilization. And as the black third of the land grows in thrift and skill, unless skilfully guided in its larger philosophy, it must more and more brood over the red past and the creeping, crooked present, until it grasps a gospel of revolt and revenge and throws its new-found energies athwart the current of advance. Even to-day the masses of the Negroes see all too clearly the anomalies of their position and the moral crookedness of yours. You may marshal strong indictments against them, but their counter-cries, lacking though they be in formal logic, have burning truths within them which you may not wholly ignore, O Southern Gentlemen! If you deplore their presence here, they ask, Who brought us? When you cry, Deliver us from the vision of intermarriage, they answer that legal marriage is infinitely better than systematic concubinage and prostitution. And if in just fury you accuse their vagabonds of violating women, they also in fury quite as just may reply: The wrong which your gentlemen have done against helpless black women in defiance of your own laws is written on the foreheads of two millions of mulattoes, and written in ineffaceable blood. And finally, when you fasten crime upon this race as its peculiar trait, they answer that slavery was the arch-crime, and lynching and lawlessness its twin abortion; that color and race are not crimes, and yet they it is which in this land receives most unceasing condemnation, North, East, South, and West.

I will not say such arguments are wholly justified, — I will not insist that there is no other side to the shield; but I do say that of the nine millions of Negroes in this nation, there is scarcely one out of the cradle to whom these arguments do not daily present themselves in the guise of terrible truth. I insist that the question of the future is how best to keep these millions from brooding over the wrongs of the past and the difficulties of the present, so that all energies may be bent toward a cheerful striving and co-operation with their white neighbors toward a larger, juster, and fuller future. That one wise method of doing this lies in the closer knitting of the Negro to the great industrial possibilities of the South is a great truth. And this the common schools and the manual training and trade schools are working to accomplish. But these alone are not enough. The foundations of knowledge in this race, as in others, must be sunk deep in the college and university if we would build a solid, permanent structure. Internal problems of social advance must inevitably come, — problems of work and wages, of families and homes, of morals and the true valuing of the things of life; and all these and other inevitable problems of civilization the Negro must meet and solve largely for himself, by reason of his isolation; and can there be any possible solution other than by study and thought and an appeal to the rich experience of the past? Is there not, with such a group and in such a crisis, infinitely more danger to be apprehended from half-trained minds and shallow thinking than from over-education and over-refinement? Surely we have

wit enough to found a Negro college so manned and equipped as to steer successfully between the *dilettante* and the fool. We shall hardly induce black men to believe that if their stomachs be full, it matters little about their brains. They already dimly perceive that the paths of peace winding between honest toil and dignified manhood call for the guidance of skilled thinkers, the loving, reverent comradeship between the black lowly and the black men emancipated by training and culture.

The function of the Negro college, then, is clear: it must maintain the standards of popular education, it must seek the social regeneration of the Negro, and it must help in the solution of problems of race contact and co-operation. And finally, beyond all this, it must develop men. Above our modern socialism, and out of the worship of the mass, must persist and evolve that higher individualism which the centers of culture protect; there must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new. Such souls aforesaid have inspired and guided worlds, and if we be not wholly bewitched by our Rhine-gold, they shall again. Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange renderings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. And to themselves in these the days that try their souls, the chance to soar in the dim blue air above the smoke is to their finer spirits boon and guerdon for what they lose on earth by being black.

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pishgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Throughout this selection from *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois's writing is rich in figurative language and rich in allusion, incorporating references to a history of writing, reading, and thinking. Du Bois's prose is not straightforward. It is carefully worked and highly elaborated. As you reread, choose three or four passages where the language calls attention to itself, passages that show evidence of a writer trying to *do* something unusual or out of the ordinary, passages that create certain effects or present certain challenges.

Review these passages carefully and be prepared to talk about what Du Bois is doing and why he is doing it. What can a writer learn from Du Bois's example?

For the purposes of this exercise, assume that Du Bois is doing something other than decorating his sentences or making the writing "pretty." Assume that he is trying to think things through and that this writing is a necessary part of that thinking. Or assume that he is trying to make certain demands on himself, his subject matter, and his reader, and that this language is evidence of these demands. Or assume that he is trying to establish an identity for himself, as a writer — what is this identity? Or assume that he is trying to teach a reader how to read — what is this way of reading?

What, then, is Du Bois doing in the passages you have chosen? How does the language change from paragraph to paragraph? Where is it the same? What are the risks or liabilities of this way of writing?

2. As you reread Du Bois, mark moments in the text (phrases and passages) that you think are particularly poignant for us to continue to think about in the twenty-first century. Which passages seem to have the most resonance for you in thinking about the past few decades of your life — your experiences, your observations, your knowledge of political climates, and current events in the news? It might help you to think also about this question: what might Du Bois tell all of us now about conceptions of race and the state of education in our communities and in our world?
3. As you reread the selection, think about the context for Du Bois's argument; do this by reading closely and looking to see when and how he represents his audience, particularly those readers he feels he will have to work the hardest to convince. Where do you see Du Bois working hardest on these readers? What ideas is Du Bois working against?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. In "The Forethought," the introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes:

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.

This can be read as a sign of Du Bois's concern that his book will be misread and misunderstood. In "The Forethought," he makes one more attempt to prepare a reader for his book and the project it represents. What might it mean to read this book with "patience"? Who is his "Gentle Reader" (and is that phrase offered with faith or with irony)? How might the chapter you have read be

used to think about “the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century”? And how do his arguments and ideas help you think about notions of race and identity in our current moment?

Write an essay that addresses these questions or that uses the chapter to think about Du Bois’s project as it is articulated in his introduction. Below are some questions to direct your work.

“Of the Training of Black Men” might be conceptualized as an argument concerning the history and direction of higher education in the South. Du Bois argues that to understand the “meaning of being black,” one must understand the position of African Americans in the South. As you work with this chapter, what textual evidence can you find to help establish the context for Du Bois’s argument? Who is he arguing with and on what terms? Where do you see Du Bois working hardest on these readers? What ideas is Du Bois working against? What strategies does he use? How and where does he work to both teach a reader to understand, and convince a reader?

2. Throughout this selection, Du Bois’s writing is rich in figurative language and rich in allusion, incorporating references to a history of writing, reading, and thinking. Du Bois’s prose is not straightforward and simple. It is carefully worked and highly elaborated. And it serves his project.

Write an essay on Du Bois’s style in *The Souls of Black Folk*. You will need to choose a workable set of examples — passages from the chapter where the language calls attention to itself, passages that show evidence of a writer trying to *do* something unusual or out of the ordinary, passages that create certain effects or present certain challenges.

You should imagine that you are writing for readers who have read *The Souls of Black Folk*, but who won’t have the text in front of them. You will need to introduce and present these passages. And you will need to be prepared to talk about what Du Bois is doing and *why* he is doing it.

For the purposes of this exercise, you should assume that Du Bois is doing something other than decorating his sentences or making the writing “pretty.” Assume that he is trying to think things through and that this writing is a necessary part of that thinking. Or assume that he is trying to make certain demands on himself, his subject matter, and his reader, and that this language is evidence of these demands. Or assume that he is trying to establish an identity for himself, as a writer — what is this identity? Or assume that he is trying to teach a reader how to read — what is this way of reading? What, then, is Du Bois doing in the sentences you have chosen? What might a writer learn from his example?

3. In “The Forethought,” the introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes:

Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.

Write an essay that looks at this chapter in light of the project and the concerns outlined by Du Bois in "The Forethought." You should imagine that your reader is interested in knowing something about Du Bois and, through his writing, about the experience of African Americans almost 100 years ago and how that experience might connect to our current moment. You should think of yourself as a historian, using this text (not only what it says but *how* it says what it says) as your primary document. And, as you help someone to think through the chapter, you should ask: How might this writing be significant now, more than 100 years later? Where and how are Du Bois's concerns represented today, for example, in the curriculum of your university? If you look at the structures of education today, what might you say, following Du Bois, about the problems of the color-line?

4. There is an interesting and characteristic sentence toward the end of "Of the Training of Black Men" that nicely illustrates a difficulty Du Bois has in writing women into his account of education. He says:

Comparing them as a class [black students educated in the South] with my fellow students in New England and in Europe, I cannot hesitate in saying that nowhere have I met men and women with a broader spirit of helpfulness, with deeper devotion to their life-work, or with more consecrated determination to succeed in the face of bitter difficulties than among Negro college-bred men. (p. 280)

The "men and women" at the opening of the sentence become "college-bred men" by its close. Go back and reread this selection, looking carefully to see how and where women are represented. Where are Du Bois's sympathies? What does he take for granted? What does he struggle to acknowledge? (It might also be useful to do some research for this assignment — to find out, for example, about the educational opportunities available to women and, in particular, to black women at the turn of the century, or to read other pieces by Du Bois on the status of women. For the latter, the collection of essays and articles in the Library of America edition, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, is particularly useful.)

Write an essay in which you represent and discuss the ways Du Bois figures women into his account of the issues confronting the education of black Americans in the South at the turn of the century. Where and how are they present? Where and how are they absent? And how would you account for their position in these texts?

A word of caution: it should be clear that it is not enough to claim in absolute terms that Du Bois is sexist or that he is a product of his time. It serves no good purpose to reduce Du Bois to a stick figure (and it would be wrong); texts are all in one way or another products of their times, and a student would have to do a considerable amount of work to be able to speak responsibly about what Americans thought or said in 1903. Your work here is to locate in Du Bois's writing passages that will allow you to think about his efforts to write about gender, race, and education.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

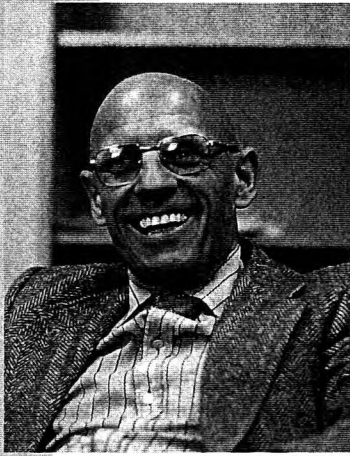
1. W. E. B. Du Bois writes about the formation of young African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He writes about the conditions of living and about the possibilities for schooling. In our own time, Ta-Nehisi Coates, in "Between the World and Me" (p. 242), Kwame Anthony Appiah, in "Racial Identities" (p. 38), and June Jordan, in "Nobody Mean More to Me than You" (p. 399), write about similar subjects an entire century later.

Choose one of these essays to place in conversation with this selection from Du Bois's book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Reread the selections, paying particular attention to how the writers draw upon their own experience and observations, how they address their audience (or audiences), and how they understand the limits and potential of racial identity (and racial identification).

Write an essay in which you think about the similarities across time and place and circumstance. What seems constant? necessary? inevitable? What has changed across time? What is particular to these two writers' arguments, observations, and conclusions? How do they differ? And why, do you suppose? And, finally, where are you in this conversation? How might you locate yourself in relation to the arguments you've studied so closely?

2. W. E. B. Du Bois writes to reform American education. There are many other writers in *Ways of Reading* who write as agents of change, although with different starting points, different concerns, and different agendas: Joy Castro, in "Hungry" and "On Becoming Educated" (pp. 207, 210); Mary Louise Pratt, in "Arts of the Contact Zone" (p. 454); Claudia Rankine, in *Citizen* (p. 501); Scaachi Koul, in "Hunting Season" (p. 417); and Gloria Bird, in "Autobiography as Spectacle" (p. 168), are just a few examples.

Write an essay in which you put one of these essays (or another from *Ways of Reading*) into conversation with "Of the Training of Black Men". Where and how do they speak to the same issues? Where and how do they differ in their arguments and in their approach? How are they different as pieces of writing — different in style and in intent? You will need to represent carefully the positions of each. You will need to think about differences as well as similarities. And you should think about how and why the differences might be attributed to history, to race, or to gender.



MICHEL Foucault

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) stands at the beginning of the twenty-first century as one of the world's leading intellectuals. He was trained as a philosopher, but much of his work, like that presented in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), traces the presence of certain ideas across European history. So he could also be thought of as a historian, but a historian whose goal is to revise the usual understanding of history—not as a progressive sequence but as a series of repetitions governed by powerful ideas, terms, and figures. Foucault was also a public intellectual, involved in such prominent issues as prison reform. He wrote frequently for French newspapers and reviews. His death from AIDS was front-page news in *Le Monde*, the French equivalent of the *New York Times*. He taught at several French universities and in 1970 was appointed to a professorship at the Collège de France, the highest position in the French system. He traveled widely, visiting and lecturing at universities throughout the world.

Foucault's work is central to much current work in the humanities and the social sciences. In fact, it is hard to imagine any area of the academy that has not been influenced by his writing. There is a certain irony in all this, since Foucault argued persuasively that we need to give up thinking about knowledge as individually produced; we have to stop thinking the way we do about the "author" or the "genius," about individuality or creativity; we have to stop thinking as though there were truths that stand beyond the interests of a given moment. It is both dangerous and wrong, he argued, to assume that knowledge is disinterested. Edward Said had this to say of Foucault:

His great critical contribution was to dissolve the anthropological models of identity and subjecthood underlying research in the humanistic and social sciences. Instead of seeing everything in culture and society as ultimately emanating from either a sort of unchanging Cartesian ego or a heroic solitary artist, Foucault proposed the much juster notion that all work, like social life itself, is collective. The principal task therefore is to circumvent or break down the ideological biases that prevent us from saying that what enables a doctor to practice medicine or a historian to write history is not mainly a set of individual gifts, but an ability to follow rules that are taken for granted as an

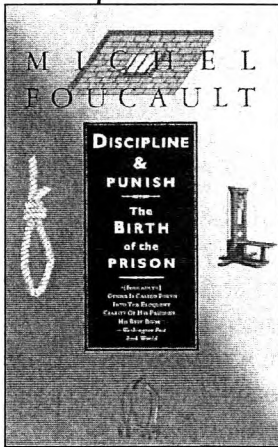
unconscious a priori by all professionals. More than anyone before him, Foucault specified rules for those rules, and even more impressively, he showed how over long periods of time the rules became epistemological enforcers of what (as well as of how) people thought, lived, and spoke.

These rules, these unconscious enforcers, are visible in "discourse"—ways of thinking and speaking and acting that we take for granted as naturally or inevitably there but that are constructed over time and preserved by those who act without question, without stepping outside the discourse and thinking critically. But, says Foucault, there is no place "outside" the discourse, no free, clear space. There is always only another discursive position. A person in thinking, living, and speaking expresses not merely himself or herself but the thoughts and roles and phrases governed by the available ways of thinking and speaking. The key questions to ask, then, according to Foucault, are not Who said this? or Is it original? or Is it true? or Is it authentic? but Who talks this way? or What unspoken rules govern this way of speaking? or Where is this discourse used? Who gets to use it? when? and to what end?

The following selection is the third chapter of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (translated from the French by Alan Sheridan). In this book, Foucault is concerned with the relationships between knowledge and power, arguing that knowledge is not pure and abstract but implicated in networks of power relations. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, people govern themselves "through the production of truth." This includes the "truths" that determine how we imagine and manage the boundaries between the "normal" and the transgressive, the lawful and the delinquent. In a characteristic move, Foucault reverses our intuitive sense of how things are. He argues, for example, that it is the case not that prisons serve the courts and a system of justice but that the courts are the products, the servants of "the prison," the prison as an idea, as the central figure in a way of thinking about transgression, order, and the body, a way of thinking that is persistent and general, present, for example, through all efforts to produce the normal or "disciplined individual": "in the central position that [the prison] occupies, it is not alone, but linked to a whole series of 'carceral' mechanisms which seem distinct enough—since they are intended to alleviate pain, to cure, to comfort—but which all tend, like the prison, to exercise a power of normalization." Knowledge stands in an antagonistic role in *Discipline and Punish*; it is part of a problem, not a route to a solution.

You will find "Panopticism" difficult reading. All readers find Foucault's prose tough going. It helps to realize that it is necessarily difficult. Foucault, remember, is trying to work outside of, or in spite of, the usual ways of thinking and writing. He is trying not to reproduce the standard discourse but to point to what it cannot or will not say. He is trying to make gestures beyond what is ordinarily, normally said. So his prose struggles with its own situation. Again, as Edward Said says,

What [Foucault] was interested in . . . was "the more" that can be discovered lurking in signs and discourses but that is irreducible to language and speech; "it is this 'more,'" he said, "that we must reveal and



describe." Such a concern appears to be both devious and obscure, yet it accounts for a lot that is especially unsettling in Foucault's writing. There is no such thing as being at home in his writing, neither for reader nor for writer.

While readers find Foucault difficult, he is widely read and widely cited. His books include *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Madness and Civilization* (1971), and the three-volume *History of Sexuality* (1976, 1979, 1984).

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Panopticism

The following, according to an order published at the end of the seventeenth century, were the measures to be taken when the plague appeared in a town.¹

First, a strict spatial partitioning: the closing of the town and its outlying districts, a prohibition to leave the town on pain of death, the killing of all stray animals; the division of the town into distinct quarters, each governed by an intendant. Each street is placed under the authority of a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance; if he leaves the street, he will be condemned to death. On the appointed day, everyone is ordered to stay indoors: it is forbidden to leave on pain of death. The syndic himself comes to lock the door of each house from the outside; he takes the key with him and hands it over to the intendant of the quarter; the intendant keeps it until the end of the quarantine. Each family will have made its own provisions; but, for bread and wine, small wooden canals are set up between the street and the interior of the houses, thus allowing each person to receive his ration without communicating with the suppliers and other residents; meat, fish, and herbs will be hoisted up into the houses with pulleys and baskets. If it is absolutely necessary to leave the house, it will be done in turn, avoiding any meeting. Only the intendants, syndics, and guards will move about the streets and also, between the infected houses, from one corpse to another, the "crows," who can be left to die: these are "people of little substance who carry the sick, bury the dead, clean, and do many vile and abject offices." It is a segmented, immobile, frozen space. Each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion, or punishment.

Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere: "A considerable body of militia, commanded by good officers and men of substance," guards at the gates, at the town hall, and in every quarter to ensure the prompt obedience of the people and the most absolute authority of the magistrates, "as also to observe all disorder, theft and extortion." At each of the town gates there will be an observation post; at the end of each street sentinels. Every day, the intendant visits the quarter in his charge, inquires whether the syndics have carried out their tasks, whether the inhabitants have anything to complain of; they "observe their actions." Every day, too, the syndic goes into the street for which he is responsible; stops before each house: gets all the inhabitants to appear at the windows (those who live overlooking the courtyard will be allocated a window looking onto the street at which no one but they may show themselves); he calls each of them by name; informs himself as to the state of each and every one of them — "in which respect the inhabitants will be compelled

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to speak the truth under pain of death"; if someone does not appear at the window, the syndic must ask why: "In this way he will find out easily enough whether dead or sick are being concealed." Everyone locked up

in his cage, everyone at his window, answering to his name and showing himself when asked — it is the great review of the living and the dead.

This surveillance is based on a system of permanent registration: reports from the syndics to the intendants, from the intendants to the magistrates or mayor. At the beginning of the "lock up," the role of each of the inhabitants present in the town is laid down, one by one;

this document bears "the name, age, sex of everyone, notwithstanding his condition": a copy is sent to the intendant of the quarter, another to the office of the town hall, another to enable the syndic to make his daily roll call. Everything that may be observed during the course of the visits — deaths, illnesses, complaints, irregularities — is noted down and transmitted to the intendants and magistrates. The magistrates have complete control over medical treatment; they have appointed a physician in charge; no other practitioner may treat, no apothecary prepare medicine, no confessor visit a sick person without having received from him a written note "to prevent anyone from concealing and dealing with those sick of the contagion, unknown to the magistrates." The registration of the pathological must be constantly centralized. The relation of each individual to his disease and to his death passes through the representatives of power, the registration they make of it, the decisions they take on it.

Five or six days after the beginning of the quarantine, the process of purifying the houses one by one is begun. All the inhabitants are made to leave; in each room "the furniture and goods" are raised from the ground or suspended from the air; perfume is poured around the room; after carefully sealing the windows, doors, and even the keyholes with wax, the perfume is set alight. Finally, the entire house is closed while the perfume is consumed; those who have carried out the work are searched, as they were on entry, "in the presence of the residents of the house, to see that they did not have something on their persons as they left that they did not have on entering." Four hours later, the residents are allowed to reenter their homes.

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed among the living beings, the sick, and the dead — all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. The plague is met by order;

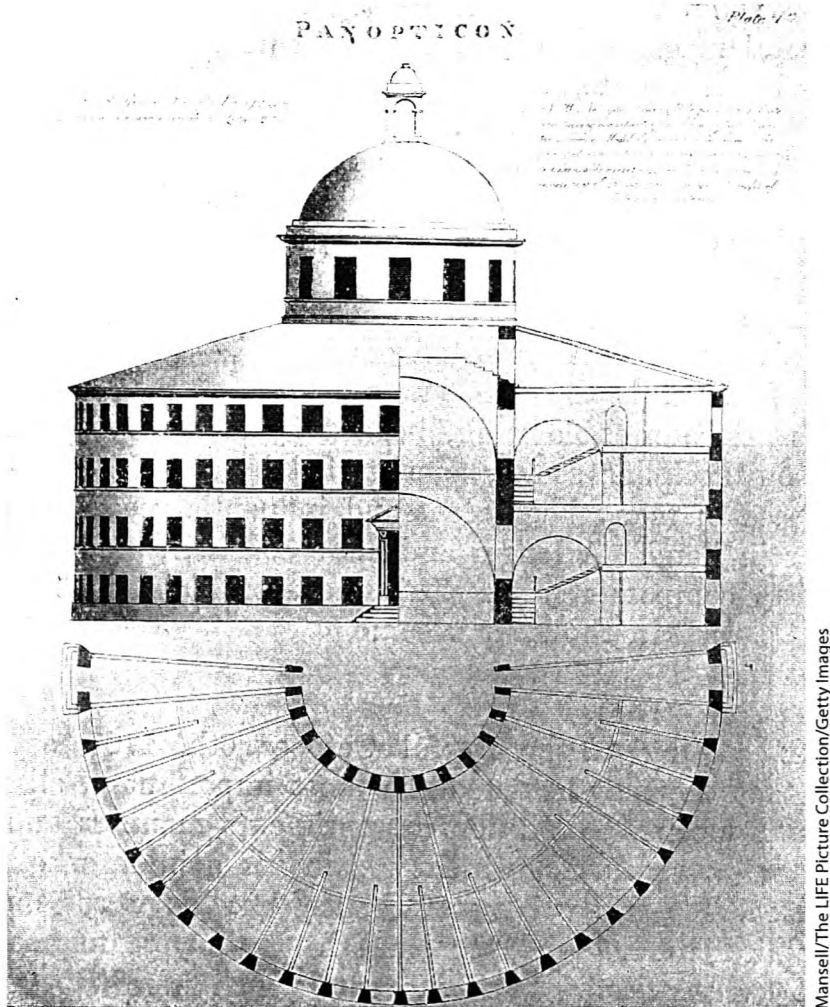
its function is to sort out every possible confusion: that of the disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together; that of the evil, which is increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions. It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease, and his death, his well-being, by means of an omnipresent and omniscient power that subdivides itself in a regular, uninterrupted way even to the ultimate determination of the individual, of what characterizes him, of what belongs to him, of what happens to him. Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis. A whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague: suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear. But there was also a political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his "true" name, his "true" place, his "true" body, his "true" disease. The plague as a form, at once real and imaginary, of disorder had as its medical and political correlative discipline. Behind the disciplinary mechanisms can be read the haunting memory of "contagions," of the plague, of rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder.

If it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power. The leper was caught up in a practice of rejection, of exile-enclosure; he was left to his doom in a mass among which it was useless to differentiate; those sick of the plague were caught up in a meticulous tactical partitioning in which individual differentiations were the constricting effects of a power that multiplied, articulated, and subdivided itself; the great confinement on the one hand; the correct training on the other. The leper and his separation; the plague and its segmentations. The first is marked; the second analyzed and distributed. The exile of the leper and the arrest of the plague do not bring with them the same political dream. The first is that of a pure community, the second that of a disciplined society. Two ways of exercising power over men, of controlling their relations, of separating out their dangerous mixtures. The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies — this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city. The plague (envisaged as a possibility at least)

is the trial in the course of which one may define ideally the exercise of disciplinary power. In order to make rights and laws function according to pure theory, the jurists place themselves in imagination in the state of nature; in order to see perfect disciplines functioning, rulers dreamed of the state of plague. Underlying disciplinary projects the image of the plague stands for all forms of confusion and disorder; just as the image of the leper, cut off from all human contact, underlies projects of exclusion.

They are different projects, then, but not incompatible ones. We see them coming slowly together, and it is the peculiarity of the nineteenth century that it applied to the space of exclusion of which the leper was the symbolic inhabitant (beggars, vagabonds, madmen, and the disorderly formed the real population) the technique of power proper to disciplinary partitioning. Treat "lepers" as "plague victims," project the subtle segmentations of discipline onto the confused space of internment, combine it with the methods of analytical distribution proper to power, individualize the excluded, but use procedures of individualization to mark exclusion — this is what was operated regularly by disciplinary power from the beginning of the nineteenth century in the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school, and to some extent, the hospital. Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.). On the one hand, the lepers are treated as plague victims; the tactics of individualizing disciplines are imposed on the excluded; and, on the other hand, the universality of disciplinary controls makes it possible to brand the "leper" and to bring into play against him the dualistic mechanisms of exclusion. The constant division between the normal and the abnormal, to which every individual is subjected, brings us back to our own time, by applying the binary branding and exile of the leper to quite different objects; the existence of a whole set of techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising, and correcting the abnormal brings into play the disciplinary mechanisms to which the fear of the plague gave rise. All the mechanisms of power which, even today, are disposed around the abnormal individual, to brand him and to alter him, are composed of those two forms from which they distantly derive.

Bentham's *Panopticon* is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the center, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned



Mansell/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

Plan of the Panopticon by J. Bentham (*The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. Bowring, vol. IV, 1843, 172–73).

man, a worker, or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions — to enclose, to deprive of light, and to hide — it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which is ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap.

To begin with, this made it possible — as a negative effect — to avoid those compact, swarming, howling masses that were to be found in places of confinement, those painted by Goya or described by Howard. Each

individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot, an attempt at collective escape, the planning of new crimes for the future, bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen, there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another;



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Handwriting model. *Collections historiques de l'I.N.R.D.P.*

if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect, or cause accidents. The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude (Bentham 60–64).

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. To achieve this, it is at once too much and too little that the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed; too much, because he has no need in fact of being so. In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. In order to make the presence or absence of the inspector unverifiable, so that the prisoners, in their cells, cannot even see a shadow, Bentham envisaged not only venetian blinds on the windows of the central observation hall, but, on the inside, partitions that intersected the hall at right angles and, in order to pass from one quarter to the other, not doors but zigzag openings; for the slightest noise, a gleam of light, a brightness in a half-opened door would betray the presence of the guardian.² The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see / being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.³

It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. The ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which the sovereign's surplus power was manifested are useless. There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine: in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants (Bentham 45). Similarly, it does not matter what motive animates him: the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a

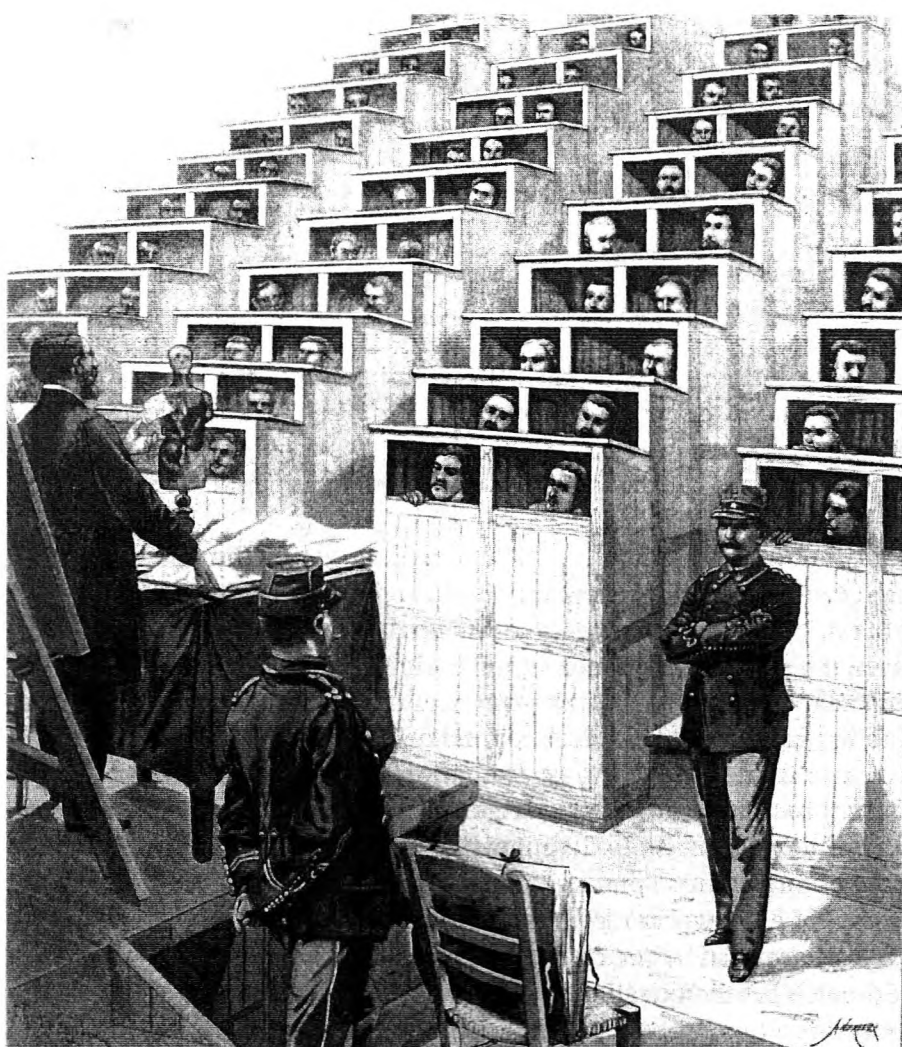


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Interior of the penitentiary at Stateville, United States, twentieth century.

child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing. The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power.

A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behavior, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of the regulations. Bentham was surprised that panoptic institutions could be so light: there were no more bars, no more



Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo

Lecture on the evils of alcoholism in the auditorium of Fresnes prison.

chains, no more heavy locks; all that was needed was that the separations should be clear and the openings well arranged. The heaviness of the old "houses of security," with their fortresslike architecture, could be replaced by the simple, economic geometry of a "house of certainty." The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side — to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may

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throw off its physical weight; it tends to the noncorporeal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound, and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance.

Bentham does not say whether he was inspired, in his project, by Le Vaux's menagerie at Versailles: the first menagerie in which the different elements are not, as they traditionally were, distributed in a park (Loisel 104–7). At the center was an octagonal pavilion which, on the first floor, consisted of only a single room, the king's *salon*; on every side large windows looked out onto seven cages (the eighth side was reserved for the entrance), containing different species of animals. By Bentham's time, this menagerie had disappeared. But one finds in the program of the Panopticon a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space. The Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping, and the king by the machinery of a furtive power. With this exception, the Panopticon also does the work of a naturalist. It makes it possible to draw up differences: among patients, to observe the symptoms of each individual, without the proximity of beds, the circulation of miasmas, the effects of contagion confusing the clinical tables; among schoolchildren, it makes it possible to observe performances (without there being any imitation or copying), to map aptitudes, to assess characters, to draw up rigorous classifications, and in relation to normal development, to distinguish "laziness and stubbornness" from "incurable imbecility"; among workers, it makes it possible to note the aptitudes of each worker, compare the time he takes to perform a task, and if they are paid by the day, to calculate their wages (Bentham 60–64).

So much for the question of observation. But the Panopticon was also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behavior, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects. To try out different punishments on prisoners, according to their crimes and character, and to seek the most effective ones. To teach different techniques simultaneously to the workers, to decide which is the best. To try out pedagogical experiments — and in particular to take up once again the well-debated problem of secluded education, by using orphans. One would see what would happen when, in their sixteenth or eighteenth year, they were presented with other boys or girls; one could verify whether, as Helvetius thought, anyone could learn anything; one would follow "the genealogy of every observable idea"; one could bring up different children according to different systems of thought, making certain children believe that two and two do not make four or that the moon is a cheese, then put them together when they are twenty or twenty-five years old; one would then have discussions that would be worth a great deal more than the sermons or lectures on which so much money is spent; one would have at least an opportunity of making discoveries in the domain of metaphysics. The Panopticon is a privileged place for experiments on men, and for analyzing with complete certainty the

transformations that may be obtained from them. The Panopticon may even provide an apparatus for supervising its own mechanisms. In this central tower, the director may spy on all the employees that he has under his orders: nurses, doctors, foremen, teachers, warders; he will be able to judge them continuously, alter their behavior, impose upon them the methods he thinks best; and it will even be possible to observe the director himself. An inspector arriving unexpectedly at the center of the Panopticon will be able to judge at a glance, without anything being concealed from him, how the entire establishment is functioning. And, in any case, enclosed as he is in the middle of this architectural mechanism, is not the director's own fate entirely bound up with it? The incompetent physician who has allowed contagion to spread, the incompetent prison governor or workshop manager will be the first victims of an epidemic or a revolt. "By every tie I could devise," said the master of the Panopticon, "my own fate had been bound up by me with theirs" (Bentham 177). The Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory of power. Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men's behavior; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power is exercised.

The plague-stricken town, the panoptic establishment — the differences are important. They mark, at a distance of a century and a half, the transformations of the disciplinary program. In the first case, there is an exceptional situation: against an extraordinary evil, power is mobilized; it makes itself everywhere present and visible; it invents new mechanisms; it separates, it immobilizes, it partitions; it constructs for a time what is both a counter-city and the perfect society; it imposes an ideal functioning, but one that is reduced, in the final analysis, like the evil that it combats, to a simple dualism of life and death: that which moves brings death, and one kills that which moves. The Panopticon, on the other hand, must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. No doubt Bentham presents it as a particular institution, closed in upon itself. Utopias, perfectly closed in upon themselves, are common enough. As opposed to the ruined prisons, littered with mechanisms of torture, to be seen in Piranesi's engravings, the Panopticon presents a cruel, ingenious cage. The fact that it should have given rise, even in our own time, to so many variations, projected or realized, is evidence of the imaginary intensity that it has possessed for almost two hundred years. But the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance, or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use.

It is polyvalent in its applications; it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work. It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another,

of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centers and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons. Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behavior must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used. It is — necessary modifications apart — applicable “to all establishments whatsoever, in which, within a space not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspection” (Bentham 40; although Bentham takes the penitentiary house as his prime example, it is because it has many different functions to fulfill — safe custody, confinement, solitude, forced labor, and instruction).

In each of its applications, it makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. It does this in several ways: because it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised. Because it is possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offenses, mistakes, or crimes have been committed. Because, in these conditions, its strength is that it never intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise, it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow from one another. Because, without any physical instrument other than architecture and geometry, it acts directly on individuals; it gives “power of mind over mind.” The panoptic schema makes any apparatus of power more intense: it assures its economy (in material, in personnel, in time); it assures its efficacy by its preventative character, its continuous functioning, and its automatic mechanisms. It is a way of obtaining from power “in hitherto unexampled quantity,” “a great and new instrument of government . . . ; its great excellence consists in the great strength it is capable of giving to *any* institution it may be thought proper to apply it to” (Bentham 66).

It’s a case of “it’s easy once you’ve thought of it” in the political sphere. It can in fact be integrated into any function (education, medical treatment, production, punishment); it can increase the effect of this function, by being linked closely with it; it can constitute a mixed mechanism in which relations of power (and of knowledge) may be precisely adjusted, in the smallest detail, to the processes that are to be supervised; it can establish a direct proportion between “surplus power” and “surplus production.” In short, it arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact. The panoptic mechanism is not simply a hinge, a point of exchange between a mechanism of power and a function; it is a way of making power relations function in a function, and of making a function function through these power relations. Bentham’s preface to *Panopticon* opens with a list of the benefits to be obtained from his “inspection-house”: “*Morals reformed — health preserved — industry invigorated — instruction diffused — public burthens lightened — Economy seated, as it were, upon*

a rock — the Gordian knot of the Poor-Laws not cut, but untied — all by a simple idea in architecture!" (Bentham 39).

Furthermore, the arrangement of this machine is such that its enclosed nature does not preclude a permanent presence from the outside: we have seen that anyone may come and exercise in the central tower the functions of surveillance, and that, this being the case, he can gain a clear idea of the way in which the surveillance is practiced. In fact, any panoptic institution, even if it is as rigorously closed as a penitentiary, may without difficulty be subjected to such irregular and constant inspections: and not only by the appointed inspectors, but also by the public; any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, prisons function. There is no risk, therefore, that the increase of power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny; the disciplinary mechanism will be democratically controlled, since it will be constantly accessible "to the great tribunal committee of the world."⁴ This Panopticon, subtly arranged so that an observer may observe, at a glance, so many different individuals, also enables everyone to come and observe any of the observers. The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.

The panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing any of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function. The plague-stricken town provided an exceptional disciplinary model: perfect, but absolutely violent; to the disease that brought death, power opposed its perpetual threat of death; life inside it was reduced to its simplest expression; it was, against the power of death, the meticulous exercise of the right of the sword. The Panopticon, on the other hand, has a role of amplification; although it arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and more effective, it does so not for power itself, nor for the immediate salvation of a threatened society: its aim is to strengthen the social forces — to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply.

How is power to be strengthened in such a way that, far from impeding progress, far from weighing upon it with its rules and regulations, it actually facilitates such progress? What intensifier of power will be able at the same time to be a multiplier of production? How will power, by increasing its forces, be able to increase those of society instead of confiscating them or impeding them? The Panopticon's solution to this problem is that the productive increase of power can be assured only if, on the one hand, it can be exercised continuously in the very foundations of society, in the subtlest possible way, and if, on the other hand, it functions outside these sudden, violent, discontinuous forms that are bound up with the exercise of sovereignty. The body of the king, with its strange material and physical presence, with the force that he himself deploys or transmits to some few others, is at the opposite extreme of this new

physics of power represented by panopticism; the domain of panopticism is, on the contrary, that whole lower region, that region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations; what are required are mechanisms that analyze distributions, gaps, series, combinations, and which use instruments that render visible, record, differentiate, and compare: a physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity not in the person of the king, but in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations. At the theoretical level, Bentham defines another way of analyzing the social body and the power relations that traverse it; in terms of practice, he defines a procedure of subordination of bodies and forces that must increase the utility of power while practicing the economy of the prince. Panopticism is the general principle of a new "political anatomy" whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline.

The celebrated, transparent, circular cage, with its high tower, powerful and knowing, may have been for Bentham a project of a perfect disciplinary institution; but he also set out to show how one may "unlock" the disciplines and get them to function in a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body. These disciplines, which the classical age had elaborated in specific, relatively enclosed places — barracks, schools, workshops — and whose total implementation had been imagined only at the limited and temporary scale of a plague-stricken town, Bentham dreamed of transforming into a network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert, running through society without interruption in space or in time. The panoptic arrangement provides the formula for this generalization. It programs, at the level of an elementary and easily transferable mechanism, the basic functioning of a society penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms.

There are two images, then, of discipline. At one extreme, the discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution, established on the edges of society, turned inwards towards negative functions: arresting evil, breaking communications, suspending time. At the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come. The movement from one project to the other, from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalized surveillance, rests on a historical transformation: the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society.

A whole disciplinary generalization — the Benthamite physics of power represents an acknowledgment of this — had operated throughout the classical age. The spread of disciplinary institutions, whose network was beginning to cover an ever larger surface and occupying above all a less and less marginal position, testifies to this: what was an islet, a

privileged place, a circumstantial measure, or a singular model, became a general formula; the regulations characteristic of the Protestant and pious armies of William of Orange or of Gustavus Adolphus were transformed into regulations for all the armies of Europe; the model colleges of the Jesuits, or the schools of Batencour or Demia, following the example set by Sturm, provided the outlines for the general forms of educational discipline; the ordering of the naval and military hospitals provided the model for the entire reorganization of hospitals in the eighteenth century.

But this extension of the disciplinary institutions was no doubt only the most visible aspect of various, more profound processes.

1. *The functional inversion of the disciplines.* At first, they were expected to neutralize dangers, to fix useless or disturbed populations, to avoid the inconveniences of over-large assemblies; now they were being asked to play a positive role, for they were becoming able to do so, to increase the possible utility of individuals. Military discipline is no longer a mere means of preventing looting, desertion, or failure to obey orders among the troops; it has become a basic technique to enable the army to exist, not as an assembled crowd, but as a unity that derives from this very unity an increase in its forces; discipline increases the skill of each individual, coordinates these skills, accelerates movements, increases fire power, broadens the fronts of attack without reducing their vigor, increases the capacity for resistance, etc. The discipline of the workshop, while remaining a way of enforcing respect for the regulations and authorities, of preventing thefts or losses, tends to increase aptitudes, speeds, output, and therefore profits; it still exerts a moral influence over behavior, but more and more it treats actions in terms of their results, introduces bodies into a machinery, forces into an economy. When, in the seventeenth century, the provincial schools or the Christian elementary schools were founded, the justifications given for them were above all negative: those poor who were unable to bring up their children left them "in ignorance of their obligations: given the difficulties they have in earning a living, and themselves having been badly brought up, they are unable to communicate a sound upbringing that they themselves never had"; this involves three major inconveniences: ignorance of God, idleness (with its consequent drunkenness, impurity, larceny, brigandage), and the formation of those gangs of beggars, always ready to stir up public disorder and "virtually to exhaust the funds of the Hôtel-Dieu" (Demia 60–61). Now, at the beginning of the Revolution, the end laid down for primary education was to be, among other things, to "fortify," to "develop the body," to prepare the child "for a future in some mechanical work," to give him "an observant eye, a sure hand and prompt habits" (Talleyrand's Report to the Constituent Assembly, 10 September 1791, quoted by Léon 106). The disciplines function increasingly as techniques for making useful individuals. Hence their emergence from a marginal position on the confines of society, and detachment from the forms of exclusion or expiation, confinement, or retreat. Hence the slow loosening of their kinship with religious regularities and enclosures. Hence also their rooting in the

most important, most central, and most productive sectors of society. They become attached to some of the great essential functions: factory production, the transmission of knowledge, the diffusion of aptitudes and skills, the war-machine. Hence, too, the double tendency one sees developing throughout the eighteenth century to increase the number of disciplinary institutions and to discipline the existing apparatuses.

2. *The swarming of disciplinary mechanisms.* While, on the one hand, the disciplinary establishments increase, their mechanisms have a certain tendency to become "deinstitutionalized," to emerge from the closed fortresses in which they once functioned and to circulate in a "free" state; the massive, compact disciplines are broken down into flexible methods of control, which may be transferred and adapted. Sometimes the closed apparatuses add to their internal and specific function a role of external surveillance, developing around themselves a whole margin of lateral controls. Thus the Christian School must not simply train docile children; it must also make it possible to supervise the parents, to gain information as to their way of life, their resources, their piety, their morals. The school tends to constitute minute social observatories that penetrate even to the adults and exercise regular supervision over them: the bad behavior of the child, or his absence, is a legitimate pretext, according to Demia, for one to go and question the neighbors, especially if there is any reason to believe that the family will not tell the truth; one can then go and question the par-

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OBSERVATION DISSEMINATED
THROUGHOUT SOCIETY.**

ents themselves, to find out whether they know their catechism and the prayers, whether they are determined to root out the vices of their children, how many beds there are in the house and what the sleeping arrangements are; the visit may end with the giving of alms, the present of a religious picture, or the provision of additional beds (Demia 39-40). Similarly, the hospital is increasingly conceived of as a

base for the medical observation of the population outside; after the burning down of the Hôtel-Dieu in 1772, there were several demands that the large buildings, so heavy and so disordered, should be replaced by a series of smaller hospitals; their function would be to take in the sick of the quarter, but also to gather information, to be alert to any endemic or epidemic phenomena, to open dispensaries, to give advice to the inhabitants, and to keep the authorities informed of the sanitary state of the region.⁵

One also sees the spread of disciplinary procedures, not in the form of enclosed institutions, but as centers of observation disseminated throughout society. Religious groups and charity organizations had long played this role of "disciplining" the population. From the Counter-Reformation to the philanthropy of the July monarchy, initiatives of this type continued to increase; their aims were religious (conversion and moralization), economic (aid and encouragement to work), or political

(the struggle against discontent or agitation). One has only to cite by way of example the regulations for the charity associations in the Paris parishes. The territory to be covered was divided into quarters and cantons and the members of the associations divided themselves up along the same lines. These members had to visit their respective areas regularly. "They will strive to eradicate places of ill-repute, tobacco shops, life-classes, gaming houses, public scandals, blasphemy, impiety, and any other disorders that may come to their knowledge." They will also have to make individual visits to the poor; and the information to be obtained is laid down in regulations: the stability of the lodging, knowledge of prayers, attendance at the sacraments, knowledge of a trade, morality (and "whether they have not fallen into poverty through their own fault"); lastly, "one must learn by skillful questioning in what way they behave at home. Whether there is peace between them and their neighbors, whether they are careful to bring up their children in the fear of God . . . , whether they do not have their older children of different sexes sleeping together and with them, whether they do not allow licentiousness and cajolery in their families, especially in their older daughters. If one has any doubts as to whether they are married, one must ask to see their marriage certificate."⁶

3. *The state-control of the mechanisms of the discipline.* In England, it was private religious groups that carried out, for a long time, the functions of social discipline (cf. Radzinovitz 203–14); in France, although a part of this role remained in the hands of parish guilds or charity associations, another — and no doubt the most important part — was very soon taken over by the police apparatus.

The organization of a centralized police had long been regarded, even by contemporaries, as the most direct expression of royal absolutism; the sovereign had wished to have "his own magistrate to whom he might directly entrust his orders, his commissions, intentions, and who was entrusted with the execution of orders and orders under the King's private seal" (a note by Duval, first secretary at the police magistrature, quoted in Funck-Brentano, I). In effect, in taking over a number of preexisting functions — the search for criminals, urban surveillance, economic and political supervision — the police magistratures and the magistrature-general that presided over them in Paris transposed them into a single, strict, administrative machine: "All the radiations of force and information that spread from the circumference culminate in the magistrate-general. . . . It is he who operates all the wheels that together produce order and harmony. The effects of his administration cannot be better compared than to the movement of the celestial bodies" (Des Essarts 344, 528).

But, although the police as an institution were certainly organized in the form of a state apparatus, and although this was certainly linked directly to the center of political sovereignty, the type of power that it exercises, the mechanisms it operates, and the elements to which it applies them are specific. It is an apparatus that must be coextensive with the entire social body and not only by the extreme limits that it embraces, but by the minuteness of the details it is concerned with. Police power must bear "over

everything": it is not, however, the totality of the state nor of the kingdom as visible and invisible body of the monarch; it is the dust of events, actions, behavior, opinions — "everything that happens";⁷ the police are concerned with "those things of every moment," those "unimportant things," of which Catherine II spoke in her Great Instruction (Supplement to the *Instruction for the Drawing Up of a New Code*, 1769, article 535). With the police, one is in the indefinite world of a supervision that seeks ideally to reach the most elementary particle, the most passing phenomenon of the social body: "The ministry of the magistrates and police officers is of the greatest importance; the objects that it embraces are in a sense definite, one may perceive them only by a sufficiently detailed examination" (Delamare, unnumbered preface): the infinitely small of political power.

And, in order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert, a long, hierarchized network which, according to Le Maire, comprised for Paris the forty-eight *commissaires*, the twenty *inspecteurs*, then the "observers," who were paid regularly, the "*basses mouches*," or secret agents, who were paid by the day, then the informers, paid according to the job done, and finally the prostitutes. And this unceasing observation had to be accumulated in a series of reports and registers; throughout the eighteenth century, an immense police text increasingly covered society by means of a complex documentary organization (on the police registers in the eighteenth century, cf. Chassaigne). And, unlike the methods of judicial or administrative writing, what was registered in this way were forms of behavior, attitudes, possibilities, suspicions — a permanent account of individuals' behavior.

Now, it should be noted that, although this police supervision was entirely "in the hands of the king," it did not function in a single direction. It was in fact a double-entry system: it had to correspond, by manipulating the machinery of justice, to the immediate wishes of the king, but it was also capable of responding to solicitations from below; the celebrated *lettres de cachet*, or orders under the king's private seal, which were long the symbol of arbitrary royal rule and which brought detention into disrepute on political grounds, were in fact demanded by families, masters, local notables, neighbors, parish priests; and their function was to punish by confinement a whole infrapenality, that of disorder, agitation, disobedience, bad conduct; those things that Ledoux wanted to exclude from his architecturally perfect city and which he called "offenses of nonsurveillance." In short, the eighteenth-century police added a disciplinary function to its role as the auxiliary of justice in the pursuit of criminals and as an instrument for the political supervision of plots, opposition movements, or revolts. It was a complex function since it linked the absolute power of the monarch to the lowest levels of power disseminated in society; since, between these different, enclosed institutions of discipline (workshops,

armies, schools), it extended an intermediary network, acting where they could not intervene, disciplining the nondisciplinary spaces; but it filled in the gaps, linked them together, guaranteed with its armed force an interstitial discipline and a metadiscipline. "By means of a wise police, the sovereign accustoms the people to order and obedience" (Vattel 162).

The organization of the police apparatus in the eighteenth century sanctioned a generalization of the disciplines that became coextensive with the state itself. Although it was linked in the most explicit way with everything in the royal power that exceeded the exercise of regular justice, it is understandable why the police offered such slight resistance to the rearrangement of the judicial power; and why it has not ceased to impose its prerogatives upon it, with ever-increasing weight, right up to the present day; this is no doubt because it is the secular arm of the judiciary; but it is also because, to a far greater degree than the judicial institution, it is identified, by reason of its extent and mechanisms, with a society of the disciplinary type. Yet it would be wrong to believe that the disciplinary functions were confiscated and absorbed once and for all by a state apparatus.

"Discipline" may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a "physics" or an "anatomy" of power, a technology. And it may be taken over either by "specialized" institutions (the penitentiaries or "houses of correction" of the nineteenth century), or by institutions that use it as an essential instrument for a particular end (schools, hospitals), or by preexisting authorities that find in it a means of reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanisms of power (one day we should show how intrafamilial relations, essentially in the parents-children cell, have become "disciplined," absorbing since the classical age external schemata, first educational and military, then medical, psychiatric, psychological, which have made the family the privileged locus of emergence for the disciplinary question of the normal and the abnormal), or by apparatuses that have made discipline their principle of internal functioning (the disciplinarization of the administrative apparatus from the Napoleonic period), or finally by state apparatuses whose major, if not exclusive, function is to assure that discipline reigns over society as a whole (the police).

On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social "quarantine," to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of "panopticism." Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them, linking them together, extending them, and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations.

A few years after Bentham, Julius gave this society its birth certificate (Julius 384-86). Speaking of the panoptic principle, he said that there was

much more there than architectural ingenuity: it was an event in the "history of the human mind." In appearance, it is merely the solution of a technical problem; but, through it, a whole type of society emerges. Antiquity had been a civilization of spectacle. "To render accessible to a multitude of men the inspection of a small number of objects": this was the problem to which the architecture of temples, theaters, and circuses responded. With spectacle, there was a predominance of public life, the intensity of festivals, sensual proximity. In these rituals in which blood flowed, society found new vigor and formed for a moment a single great body. The modern age poses the opposite problem: "To procure for a small number, or even for a single individual, the instantaneous view of a great multitude." In a society in which the principal elements are no longer the community and public life, but, on the one hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state, relations can be regulated only in a form that is the exact reverse of the spectacle: "It was to the modern age, to the ever-growing influence of the state, to its ever more profound intervention in all the details and all the relations of social life, that was reserved the task of increasing and perfecting its guarantees, by using and directing towards that great aim the building and distribution of buildings intended to observe a great multitude of men at the same time."

Julius saw as a fulfilled historical process that which Bentham had described as a technical program. Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheater, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism. The importance, in historical mythology, of the Napoleonic character probably derives from the fact that it is at the point of junction of the monarchical, ritual exercise of sovereignty and the hierarchical, permanent exercise of indefinite discipline. He is the individual who looms over everything with a single gaze which no detail, however minute, can escape: "You may consider that no part of the Empire is without surveillance, no crime, no offense, no contravention that remains unpunished, and that the eye of the genius who can enlighten all embraces the whole of this vast machine, without, however, the slightest detail escaping his attention" (Treilhard 14). At the moment of its full blossoming, the disciplinary society still assumes with the Emperor the old aspect of the power of spectacle. As a monarch who is at one and the same time a usurper of the ancient throne and the organizer of the new state, he combined into a single symbolic, ultimate figure the whole of the long process by which the pomp of sovereignty, the necessarily spectacular manifestations of power, were extinguished

one by one in the daily exercise of surveillance, in a panopticism in which the vigilance of intersecting gazes was soon to render useless both the eagle and the sun.

The formation of the disciplinary society is connected with a number of broad historical processes — economic, juridico-political, and lastly, scientific — of which it forms part.

1. Generally speaking, it might be said that the disciplines are techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities. It is true that there is nothing exceptional or even characteristic in this: every system of power is presented with the same problem. But the peculiarity of the disciplines is that they try to define in relation to the multiplicities a tactics of power that fulfills three criteria: firstly, to obtain the exercise of power at the lowest possible cost (economically, by the low expenditure it involves; politically, by its discretion, its low exteriorization, its relative invisibility, the little resistance it arouses); secondly, to bring the effects of this social power to their maximum intensity and to extend them as far as possible, without either failure or interval; thirdly, to link this “economic” growth of power with the output of the apparatuses (educational, military, industrial, or medical) within which it is exercised; in short, to increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system. This triple objective of the disciplines corresponds to a well-known historical conjuncture. One aspect of this conjuncture was the large demographic thrust of the eighteenth century; an increase in the floating population (one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an antinomadic technique); a change of quantitative scale in the groups to be supervised or manipulated (from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the eve of the French Revolution, the school population had been increasing rapidly, as had no doubt the hospital population; by the end of the eighteenth century, the peacetime army exceeded 200,000 men). The other aspect of the conjuncture was the growth in the apparatus of production, which was becoming more and more extended and complex; it was also becoming more costly and its profitability had to be increased. The development of the disciplinary methods corresponded to these two processes, or rather, no doubt, to the new need to adjust their correlation. Neither the residual forms of feudal power nor the structures of the administrative monarchy, nor the local mechanisms of supervision, nor the unstable, tangled mass they all formed together could carry out this role: they were hindered from doing so by the irregular and inadequate extension of their network, by their often conflicting functioning, but above all by the “costly” nature of the power that was exercised in them. It was costly in several senses: because directly it cost a great deal to the Treasury; because the system of corrupt offices and farmed-out taxes weighed indirectly, but very heavily, on the population; because the resistance it encountered forced it into a cycle of perpetual reinforcement; because it proceeded essentially by levying (levying on money or products by royal, seigniorial, ecclesiastical taxation; levying on men or time by *corvées* of press-ganging, by locking up or banishing vagabonds). The development of the disciplines marks the appearance of

elementary techniques belonging to a quite different economy: mechanisms of power which, instead of proceeding by deduction, are integrated into the productive efficiency of the apparatuses from within, into the growth of this efficiency and into the use of what it produces. For the old principle of "levying-violence," which governed the economy of power, the disciplines substitute the principle of "mildness-production-profit." These are the techniques that make it possible to adjust the multiplicity of men and the multiplication of the apparatuses of production (and this means not only "production" in the strict sense, but also the production of knowledge and skills in the school, the production of health in the hospitals, the production of destructive force in the army).

In this task of adjustment, discipline had to solve a number of problems for which the old economy of power was not sufficiently equipped. It could reduce the inefficiency of mass phenomena: reduce what, in a multiplicity, makes it much less manageable than a unity; reduce what is opposed to the use of each of its elements and of their sum; reduce everything that may counter the advantages of number. That is why discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions. It must also master all the forces that are formed from the very constitution of an organized multiplicity; it must neutralize the effects of counterpower that spring from them and which form a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions — anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions. Hence the fact that the disciplines use procedures of partitioning and verticality, that they introduce, between the different elements at the same level, as solid separations as possible, that they define compact hierarchical networks, in short, that they oppose to the intrinsic, adverse force of multiplicity the technique of the continuous, individualizing pyramid. They must also increase the particular utility of each element of the multiplicity, but by means that are the most rapid and the least costly, that is to say, by using the multiplicity itself as an instrument of this growth. Hence, in order to extract from bodies the maximum time and force, the use of those overall methods known as timetables, collective training, exercises, total and detailed surveillance. Furthermore, the disciplines must increase the effect of utility proper to the multiplicities, so that each is made more useful than the simple sum of its elements: it is in order to increase the utilizable effects of the multiple that the disciplines define tactics of distribution, reciprocal adjustment of bodies, gestures, and rhythms, differentiation of capacities, reciprocal coordination in relation to apparatuses or tasks. Lastly, the disciplines have to bring into play the power relations, not above but inside the very texture of the multiplicity, as discreetly as possible, as well articulated on the other functions of these multiplicities and also in the least expensive way possible: to this correspond anonymous instruments of power, coextensive with the multiplicity that they regiment, such as hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment, and classification.

In short, to substitute for a power that is manifested through the brilliance of those who exercise it, a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied; to form a body of knowledge about these individuals, rather than to deploy the ostentatious signs of sovereignty. In a word, the disciplines are the ensemble of minute technical inventions that made it possible to increase the useful size of multiplicities by decreasing the inconveniences of the power which, in order to make them useful, must control them. A multiplicity, whether in a workshop or a nation, an army or a school, reaches the threshold of a discipline when the relation of the one to the other becomes favorable.

If the economic take-off of the West began with the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital, it might perhaps be said that the methods for administering the accumulation of men made possible a political take-off in relation to the traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power, which soon fell into disuse and were superseded by a subtle, calculated technology of subjection. In fact, the two processes — the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital — cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital. At a less general level, the technological mutations of the apparatus of production, the division of labor and the elaboration of the disciplinary techniques sustained an ensemble of very close relations (cf. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, chapter XIII and the very interesting analysis in Guerry and Deleule). Each makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other. The disciplinary pyramid constituted the small cell of power within which the separation, coordination, and supervision of tasks was imposed and made efficient; and analytical partitioning of time, gestures, and bodily forces constituted an operational schema that could easily be transferred from the groups to be subjected to the mechanisms of production; the massive projection of military methods onto industrial organization was an example of this modeling of the division of labor following the model laid down by the schemata of power. But, on the other hand, the technical analysis of the process of production, its “mechanical” breaking-down, were projected onto the labor force whose task it was to implement it: the constitution of those disciplinary machines in which the individual forces that they bring together are composed into a whole and therefore increased is the effect of this projection. Let us say that discipline is the unitary technique by which the body is reduced as a “political” force at the least cost and maximized as a useful force. The growth of a capitalist economy gave rise to the specific modality of disciplinary power, whose general formulas, techniques of submitting forces and bodies, in short, “political anatomy,” could be operated in the most diverse political regimes, apparatuses, or institutions.

2. The panoptic modality of power — at the elementary, technical, merely physical level at which it is situated — is not under the immediate

dependence or a direct extension of the great juridico-political structures of a society; it is nonetheless not absolutely independent. Historically, the process by which the bourgeoisie became in the course of the eighteenth century the politically dominant class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded, and formally egalitarian juridical framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary, representative regime. But the development and generalization of disciplinary mechanisms constituted the other, dark side of these processes. The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micropower that are essentially nonegalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines. And although, in a formal way, the representative regime makes it possible, directly or indirectly, with or without relays, for the will of all to form the fundamental authority of sovereignty, the disciplines provide, at the base, a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies. The real, corporal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties. The contract may have been regarded as the ideal foundation of law and political power; panopticism constituted the technique, universally widespread, of coercion. It continued to work in depth on the juridical structures of society, in order to make the effective mechanisms of power function in opposition to the formal framework that it had acquired. The "Enlightenment," which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines.

In appearance, the disciplines constitute nothing more than an infralaw. They seem to extend the general forms defined by law to the infinitesimal level of individual lives; or they appear as methods of training that enable individuals to become integrated into these general demands. They seem to constitute the same type of law on a different scale, thereby making it more meticulous and more indulgent. The disciplines should be regarded as a sort of counterlaw. They have the precise role of introducing insuperable asymmetries and excluding reciprocities.

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND
GENERALIZATION OF DISCIPLINARY
MECHANISMS CONSTITUTED THE
OTHER, DARK SIDE OF THESE
PROCESSES.**

First, because discipline creates between individuals a "private" link, which is a relation of constraints entirely different from contractual obligation; the acceptance of a discipline may be underwritten by contract; the way in which it is imposed, the mechanisms it brings into play, the nonreversible subordination of one group of people by another, the "surplus" power that is always fixed on the same side, the inequality of position of the different "partners" in relation to the common regulation, all these distinguish the disciplinary link from the contractual link, and make it possible to distort the contractual link systematically from the moment it has as its content a mechanism of discipline. We know, for example, how many real procedures undermine the legal fiction of the work contract: workshop discipline is not the least important. Moreover,

whereas the juridical systems define juridical subjects according to universal norms, the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate. In any case, in the space and during the time in which they exercise their control and bring into play the asymmetries of their power, they effect a suspension of the law that is never total, but is never annulled either. Regular and institutional as it may be, the discipline, in its mechanism, is a "counter-law." And, although the universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power, its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law. The minute disciplines, the panopticisms of every day may well be below the level of emergence of the great apparatuses and the great political struggles. But, in the genealogy of modern society, they have been, with the class domination that traverses it, the political counterpart of the juridical norms according to which power was redistributed. Hence, no doubt, the importance that has been given for so long to the small techniques of discipline, to those apparently insignificant tricks that it has invented, and even to those "sciences" that give it a respectable face; hence the fear of abandoning them if one cannot find any substitute; hence the affirmation that they are at the very foundation of society, and an element in its equilibrium, whereas they are a series of mechanisms for unbalancing power relations definitively and everywhere; hence the persistence in regarding them as the humble, but concrete form of every morality, whereas they are a set of physico-political techniques.

To return to the problem of legal punishments, the prison with all the corrective technology at its disposal is to be resituated at the point where the codified power to punish turns into a disciplinary power to observe; at the point where the universal punishments of the law are applied selectively to certain individuals and always the same ones; at the point where the redefinition of the juridical subject by the penalty becomes a useful training of the criminal; at the point where the law is inverted and passes outside itself, and where the counterlaw becomes the effective and institutionalized content of the juridical forms. What generalizes the power to punish, then, is not the universal consciousness of the law in each juridical subject; it is the regular extension, the infinitely minute web of panoptic techniques.

3. Taken one by one, most of these techniques have a long history behind them. But what was new, in the eighteenth century, was that, by being combined and generalized, they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process. At this point, the disciplines crossed the "technological" threshold. First the hospital, then the school, then, later, the workshop were not simply "reordered" by the disciplines;

they became, thanks to them, apparatuses such that any mechanism of objectification could be used in them as an instrument of subjection, and any growth of power could give rise in them to possible branches of knowledge; it was this link, proper to the technological systems, that made possible within the disciplinary element the formation of clinical medicine, psychiatry, child psychology, educational psychology, the rationalization of labor. It is a double process, then: an epistemological "thaw" through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge.

The extension of the disciplinary methods is inscribed in a broad historical process: the development at about the same time of many other technologies — agronomical, industrial, economic. But it must be recognized that, compared with the mining industries, the emerging chemical industries or methods of national accountancy, compared with the blast furnaces or the steam engine, panopticism has received little attention. It is regarded as not much more than a bizarre little utopia, a perverse dream — rather as though Bentham had been the Fourier of a police society, and the Phalanstery had taken on the form of the Panopticon. And yet this represented the abstract formula of a very real technology, that of individuals. There were many reasons why it received little praise; the most obvious is that the discourses to which it gave rise rarely acquired, except in the academic classifications, the status of sciences; but the real reason is no doubt that the power that it operates and which it augments is a direct, physical power that men exercise upon one another. An inglorious culmination had an origin that could be only grudgingly acknowledged. But it would be unjust to compare the disciplinary techniques with such inventions as the steam engine or Amici's microscope. They are much less; and yet, in a way, they are much more. If a historical equivalent or at least a point of comparison had to be found for them, it would be rather in the "inquisitorial" technique.

The eighteenth century invented the techniques of discipline and the examination, rather as the Middle Ages invented the judicial investigation. But it did so by quite different means. The investigation procedure, an old fiscal and administrative technique, had developed above all with the reorganization of the Church and the increase of the princely states in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At this time it permeated to a very large degree the jurisprudence first of the ecclesiastical courts, then of the lay courts. The investigation as an authoritarian search for a truth observed or attested was thus opposed to the old procedures of the oath, the ordeal, the judicial duel, the judgment of God, or even of the transaction between private individuals. The investigation was the sovereign power arrogating to itself the right to establish the truth by a number of regulated techniques. Now, although the investigation has since then been an integral part of Western justice (even up to our own day), one must not forget either its political origin, its link with the birth of the states and of monarchical sovereignty, or its later extension

and its role in the formation of knowledge. In fact, the investigation has been the no doubt crude, but fundamental, element in the constitution of the empirical sciences; it has been the juridico-political matrix of this experimental knowledge, which, as we know, was very rapidly released at the end of the Middle Ages. It is perhaps true to say that, in Greece, mathematics were born from techniques of measurement; the sciences of nature, in any case, were born, to some extent, at the end of the Middle Ages, from the practices of investigation. The great empirical knowledge that covered the things of the world and transcribed them into the ordering of an indefinite discourse that observes, describes, and establishes the "facts" (at a time when the Western world was beginning the economic and political conquest of this same world) had its operating model no doubt in the Inquisition — that immense invention that our recent mildness has placed in the dark recesses of our memory. But what this politico-juridical, administrative, and criminal, religious and lay, investigation was to the sciences of nature, disciplinary analysis has been to the sciences of man. These sciences, which have so delighted our "humanity" for over a century, have their technical matrix in the petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations. These investigations are perhaps to psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, criminology, and so many other strange sciences, what the terrible power of investigation was to the calm knowledge of the animals, the plants, or the earth. Another power, another knowledge. On the threshold of the classical age, Bacon, lawyer and statesman, tried to develop a methodology of investigation for the empirical sciences. What Great Observer will produce the methodology of examination for the human sciences? Unless, of course, such a thing is not possible. For, although it is true that, in becoming a technique for the empirical sciences, the investigation has detached itself from the inquisitorial procedure, in which it was historically rooted, the examination has remained extremely close to the disciplinary power that shaped it. It has always been and still is an intrinsic element of the disciplines. Of course it seems to have undergone a speculative purification by integrating itself with such sciences as psychology and psychiatry. And, in effect, its appearance in the form of tests, interviews, interrogations, and consultations is apparently in order to rectify the mechanisms of discipline: educational psychology is supposed to correct the rigors of the school, just as the medical or psychiatric interview is supposed to rectify the effects of the discipline of work. But we must not be misled; these techniques merely refer individuals from one disciplinary authority to another, and they reproduce, in a concentrated or formalized form, the schema of power-knowledge proper to each discipline (on this subject, cf. Tort). The great investigation that gave rise to the sciences of nature has become detached from its politico-juridical model; the examination, on the other hand, is still caught up in disciplinary technology.

In the Middle Ages, the procedure of investigation gradually superseded the old accusatory justice, by a process initiated from above; the disciplinary technique, on the other hand, insidiously and as if from below,

has invaded a penal justice that is still, in principle, inquisitorial. All the great movements of extension that characterize modern penality — the problematization of the criminal behind his crime, the concern with a punishment that is a correction, a therapy, a normalization, the division of the act of judgment between various authorities that are supposed to measure, assess, diagnose, cure, transform individuals — all this betrays the penetration of the disciplinary examination into the judicial inquisition.

What is now imposed on penal justice as its point of application, its “useful” object, will no longer be the body of the guilty man set up against the body of the king; nor will it be the juridical subject of an ideal contract; it will be the disciplinary individual. The extreme point of penal justice under the Ancien Régime was the infinite segmentation of the body of the regicide: a manifestation of the strongest power over the body of the greatest criminal, whose total destruction made the crime explode into its truth. The ideal point of penality today would be an indefinite discipline: an interrogation without end, an investigation that would be extended without limit to a meticulous and ever more analytical observation, a judgment that would at the same time be the constitution of a file that was never closed, the calculated leniency of a penalty that would be interlaced with the ruthless curiosity of an examination, a procedure that would be at the same time the permanent measure of a gap in relation to an inaccessible norm and the asymptotic movement that strives to meet in infinity. The public execution was the logical culmination of a procedure governed by the Inquisition. The practice of placing individuals under “observation” is a natural extension of a justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures. Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labor, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?

NOTES

¹ Archives militaires de Vincennes, A 1,516 91 sc. Pièce. This regulation is broadly similar to a whole series of others that date from the same period and earlier. [All notes are Foucault's.]

² In the *Postscript to the Panopticon*, 1791, Bentham adds dark inspection galleries painted in black around the inspector's lodge, each making it possible to observe two stories of cells.

³ In his first version of the *Panopticon*, Bentham had also imagined an acoustic surveillance, operated by means of pipes leading from the cells to the central tower. In the *Postscript* he abandoned the idea, perhaps because he could not introduce into it the principle of dissymmetry and prevent the prisoners from hearing the inspector as well as the inspector hearing them. Julius tried to develop a system of dissymmetrical listening (Julius 18).

⁴ Imagining this continuous flow of visitors entering the central tower by an underground passage and then observing the circular landscape of the Panopticon, was Bentham aware of the Panoramas that Barker was constructing at exactly the same period (the first seems to have dated from 1787) and in which the visitors, occupying the central place, saw unfolding around them a landscape, a city, or a battle? The visitors occupied exactly the place of the sovereign gaze.

⁵ In the second half of the eighteenth century, it was often suggested that the army should be used for the surveillance and general partitioning of the population. The army, as yet to undergo discipline in the seventeenth century, was regarded as a force capable of instilling it. Cf., for example, Servan, *Le Soldat citoyen*, 1780.

⁶ Arsenal, MS. 2565. Under this number, one also finds regulations for charity associations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

⁷ Le Maire in a memorandum written at the request of Sartine, in answer to sixteen questions posed by Joseph II on the Parisian police. This memorandum was published by Gazier in 1879.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Foucault's text begins with an account of a system enacted in the seventeenth century to control the spread of plague. After describing this system of surveillance, he compares it to the "rituals of exclusion" used to control lepers. He says, "The exile of the leper and the arrest of the plague do not bring with them the same political dream" (p. 293). At many points he sets up similar pairings, all in an attempt to understand the relations of power and knowledge in modern public life.

As you reread, mark the various points at which Foucault works out the differences between a prior and the current "political dream" of order. What techniques or instruments belong to each? What moments in history are defined by each? How and where are they visible in public life?

2. Toward the end of the chapter, Foucault says, "The extension of the disciplinary methods is inscribed in a broad historical process" (p. 316). Foucault writes a difficult kind of history (at one point he calls it a genealogy), since it does not make use of the usual form of historical narrative — with characters, plots, scenes, and action. As you reread, take notes that will allow you to trace time, place, and sequence (and, if you can, agents and agency) in Foucault's account of the formation of the disciplinary society based on technologies of surveillance. Why do you think he avoids a narrative mode of presentation?
3. As you reread Foucault's text, bring forward the stages in his presentation (or the development of his argument). Mark those moments that you consider

key or central to the working out of his argument concerning the panopticon. What sentences of his would you use to represent key moments in the text? The text at times turns to numbered sections. How, for example, do they function? Describe the beginning, middle, and end of the essay. Describe the skeleton or understructure of the chapter. What are its various stages or steps? How do they relate to one another?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. About three-quarters of the way into this chapter, Foucault says,

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (p. 310)

This prose is eloquent and insists on its importance to our moment and our society; it is also very hard to read or to paraphrase. Who is doing what to whom? How do we think about the individual's being carefully fabricated in the social order?

Take this chapter as a problem to solve. What is it about? What are its key arguments? its examples and conclusions? Write an essay that summarizes "Panopticism." Imagine that you are writing for readers who have read the chapter (although they won't have the pages in front of them). You will need to take time to present and discuss examples from the text. Your job is to help your readers figure out what it says. You get the chance to take the lead and be the teacher. You should feel free to acknowledge that you don't understand certain sections even as you write about them.

So, how do you write about something you don't completely understand? Here's a suggestion: when you have completed your summary, read it over and treat it as a draft. Ask questions like these: What have I left out? What was I tempted to ignore or finesse? Go back to those sections of the chapter that you ignored and bring them into your essay. Revise by adding discussions of some of the very sections you don't understand. You can write about what you think Foucault *might* be saying — you can, that is, be cautious and tentative; you can admit that the text is what it is, hard to read. You don't have to master this text. You do, however, need to see what you can make of it.

2. About a third of the way through his text, Foucault asserts, "The Panopticon is a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to,

produces homogeneous effects of power" (p. 298). Write an essay in which you explain the machinery of the panopticon as a mechanism of power. Paraphrase Foucault and, where it seems appropriate, use his words. Present Foucault's account as you understand it. As part of your essay, and in order to explain what he is getting at, include two examples — one of his, perhaps, and then one of your own.

3. Perhaps the most surprising thing about Foucault's argument in "Panopticism" is the way it equates prisons with schools, hospitals, and workplaces, sites we are accustomed to imagining as very different from a prison. Foucault argues against our commonly accepted understanding of such things.

At the end of the chapter Foucault asks two questions. These are rhetorical questions, strategically placed at the end. Presumably we are prepared to feel their force and to think of possible answers.

Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labor, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? (p. 318)

For this assignment, take the invitation of Foucault's conclusion. No, you want to respond, it is not surprising that "experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty." No, it is not surprising that "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons." Why isn't it surprising? Or, why isn't it surprising if you are thinking along with Foucault?

Write an essay in which you explore one of these possible resemblances. You may, if you choose, cite Foucault. You can certainly pick up some of his key terms or examples and put them into play. You should imagine, however, that it is your turn. With your work on Foucault behind you, you are writing to a general audience about "experts in normality" and the key sites of surveillance and control.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Both John Berger in "Ways of Seeing" (p. 138) and Michel Foucault in "Panopticism" discuss what Foucault calls "power relations." Berger claims that "the entire art of the past has now become a political issue," and he makes a case for the evolution of a "new language of images" that could "confer a new kind of power" if people were to understand history in art. Foucault argues that the Panopticon signals an "inspired" change in power relations. "It is," he says,

an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in

a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. (p. 297)

Both Berger and Foucault create arguments about power, its methods and goals. As you read through their essays, mark passages you might use to explain how each author thinks about power—where it comes from, who has it, how it works, where you look for it, how you know when you see it, what it does, where it goes. You should reread the essays as a pair, as part of a single project in which you are looking to explain theories of power.

Write an essay in which you present and explain “Ways of Seeing” and “Panopticism” as examples of Berger’s and Foucault’s theories of power. Both Berger and Foucault are arguing against usual understandings of power and knowledge and history. In this sense, their projects are similar. You should be sure, however, to look for differences as well as similarities.

2. At a key point in her essay “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy” (p. 182), Judith Butler refers to the work of Michel Foucault:

The question of who and what is considered real and true is apparently a question of knowledge. But it is also, as Michel Foucault makes plain, a question of power. Having or bearing “truth” and “reality” is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimulates as ontology. According to Foucault, one of the first tasks of a radical critique is to discern the relation “between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge.” (p. 189)

And she goes on for some length to work with passages from Foucault, although not from his book *Discipline and Punish*.

Take some time to reread Butler’s essay, paying particular attention to her use of Foucault. Where and why is Foucault helpful to her? In what ways is she providing a new argument or a counterargument? And take time to reread “Panopticism.” What passages might be useful in extending or challenging Butler’s argument in “Beside Oneself”? Using these two sources, write an essay in which you talk about Butler and Foucault and their engagement with what might be called “radical critique,” an effort (in the terms offered above) to “discern the relation ‘between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge.’”

Note: The assignment limits you to these two sources, the two selections in the textbook. Butler and Foucault have written much, and their work circulates widely. You are most likely not in a position to speak about everything they have written or about all that has been written about them. We wanted to define a starting point that was manageable. Still, if you want to do more research, you might begin by reading the Foucault essay that Butler cites, “What Is Critique?”; you might go to the library to look through books by Butler and Foucault, choosing one or two that seem to offer themselves as next steps; or you could go to essays written by scholars who, as you are, are trying to think about the two together.

3. One way to think about Foucault's text is to see Foucault as developing a theory of discipline, raising questions about the way discipline works — as a metaphor, as institutional regulation, and perhaps also as societal norms. Foucault tells us: "One also sees the spread of disciplinary procedures, not in the form of enclosed institutions, but as centers of observation disseminated throughout society" (p. 306). One might say that Susan Griffin's "Our Secret" (p. 351) is also about this idea of discipline.

Reread "Our Secret," marking in the margins any passages that seem connected to Foucault's theory of discipline. Choose three particular passages from Griffin that strike you as good examples through which to explore Foucault's theory. Write an essay that further theorizes discipline by involving Griffin's passages in the conversation. What does Griffin have to offer to this theory? How are Griffin and Foucault doing the same kind of work? Where, if anywhere, might they diverge?



ATUL Gawande

Atul Gawande (b. 1965), a surgeon at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and the Samuel O. Thier Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School as well as a writer for *The New Yorker*, is the author of *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* (2002), *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance* (2007), the *New York Times* bestseller *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right* (2009), and *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (2014).

Gawande was named one of the world's hundred most influential thinkers by *Time* magazine. He has won a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship and two National Magazine Awards, has been a finalist for the National Book Award, and has received the Lewis Thomas Award for science writing. He cofounded and chairs Lifebox, an international nonprofit dedicated to making surgeries safer.

A number of Gawande's books and essays take up the question of how we can best teach and learn. His book *The Checklist Manifesto* offers readers the simple checklist as a teaching and learning tool that saves lives in surgery and can help people prioritize and organize their lives. "Slow Ideas," an essay published in *The New Yorker* in 2013, poses questions about teaching and learning in relation to life-and-death innovations that are both fast and slow to take hold. In "Slow Ideas," as Gawande writes about the challenges in changing medical practices, we see him, in what is signature Gawande writing, using his examples to think on the page about the conditions of teaching and learning.

Slow Ideas

Why do some innovations spread so swiftly and others so slowly? Consider the very different trajectories of surgical anesthesia and antiseptics, both of which were discovered in the nineteenth century. The first public demonstration of anesthesia was in 1846. The Boston surgeon Henry Jacob Bigelow was approached by a local dentist named William Morton, who insisted that he had found a gas that could render patients insensible to the pain of surgery. That was a dramatic claim. In those days, even a minor tooth extraction was excruciating. Without effective pain control, surgeons learned to work with slashing speed. Attendants pinned patients down as they screamed and thrashed, until they fainted from the agony. Nothing ever tried had made much difference. Nonetheless, Bigelow agreed to let Morton demonstrate his claim.

On October 16, 1846, at Massachusetts General Hospital, Morton administered his gas through an inhaler in the mouth of a young man undergoing the excision of a tumor in his jaw. The patient only muttered to himself in a semi-conscious state during the procedure. The following day, the gas left a woman, undergoing surgery to cut a large tumor from her upper arm, completely silent and motionless. When she woke, she said she had experienced nothing at all.

Four weeks later, on November 18th, Bigelow published his report on the discovery of “insensibility produced by inhalation” in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*. Morton would not divulge the composition of the gas, which he called Letheon, because he had applied for a patent. But Bigelow reported that he smelled ether in it (ether was used as an ingredient in certain medical preparations), and that seems to have been enough. The idea spread like a contagion, travelling through letters, meetings, and periodicals. By mid-December, surgeons were administering ether to patients in Paris and London. By February, anesthesia had been used in almost all the capitals of Europe, and by June in most regions of the world.

There were forces of resistance, to be sure. Some people criticized anesthesia as a “needless luxury”; clergymen deplored its use to reduce pain during childbirth as a frustration of the Almighty’s designs. James Miller, a nineteenth-century Scottish surgeon who chronicled the advent of anesthesia, observed the opposition of elderly surgeons: “They closed their ears, shut their eyes, and folded their hands. . . . They had quite made up their minds that pain was a necessary evil, and must be endured.” Yet soon even the obstructors, “with a run, mounted behind — hurraing and shouting with the best.” Within seven years, virtually every hospital in America and Britain had adopted the new discovery.

Sepsis — infection — was the other great scourge of surgery. It was the single biggest killer of surgical patients, claiming as many as half of those who underwent major operations, such as a repair of an open fracture or the amputation of a limb. Infection was so prevalent that suppuration — the discharge of pus from a surgical wound — was thought to be a necessary part of healing.

In the eighteen-sixties, the Edinburgh surgeon Joseph Lister read a paper by Louis Pasteur laying out his evidence that spoiling and fermentation were the consequence of microorganisms. Lister became convinced that the same process accounted for wound sepsis. Pasteur had observed that, besides filtration and the application of heat, exposure to certain chemicals could eliminate germs. Lister had read about the city of Carlisle's success in using a small amount of carbolic acid to eliminate the odor of sewage, and reasoned that it was destroying germs. Maybe it could do the same in surgery.

During the next few years, he perfected ways to use carbolic acid for cleansing hands and wounds and destroying any germs that might enter the operating field. The result was strikingly lower rates of sepsis and death. You would have thought that, when he published his observations in a groundbreaking series of reports in *The Lancet*, in 1867, his antiseptic method would have spread as rapidly as anesthesia.

Far from it. The surgeon J. M. T. Finney recalled that, when he was a trainee at Massachusetts General Hospital two decades later, hand washing was still perfunctory. Surgeons soaked their instruments in carbolic acid, but they continued to operate in black frock coats stiffened with the blood and viscera of previous operations — the badge of a busy practice. Instead of using fresh gauze as sponges, they reused sea sponges without sterilizing them. It was a generation before Lister's recommendations became routine and the next steps were taken toward the modern standard of asepsis — that is, entirely excluding germs from the surgical field, using heat-sterilized instruments and surgical teams clad in sterile gowns and gloves.

In our era of electronic communications, we've come to expect that important innovations will spread quickly. Plenty do: think of in-vitro fertilization, genomics, and communications technologies themselves. But there's an equally long list of vital innovations that have failed to catch on. The puzzle is why.

Did the spread of anesthesia and antisepsis differ for economic reasons? Actually, the incentives for both ran in the right direction. If painless surgery attracted paying patients, so would a noticeably lower death rate. Besides, live patients were more likely to make good on their surgery bill. Maybe ideas that violate prior beliefs are harder to embrace. To nineteenth-century surgeons, germ theory seemed as illogical as, say, Darwin's theory that human beings evolved from primates. Then again, so did the idea that you could inhale a gas and enter a pain-free state of suspended animation. Proponents of anesthesia overcame belief by encouraging surgeons to try ether on a patient and witness the results for themselves — to take a test drive. When Lister tried this strategy, however, he made little progress.

The technical complexity might have been part of the difficulty. Giving Lister's methods "a try" required painstaking attention to detail. Surgeons had to be scrupulous about soaking their hands, their instruments, and even their catgut sutures in antiseptic solution. Lister also set up a device that continuously sprayed a mist of antiseptic over the surgical field.

But anesthesia was no easier. Obtaining ether and constructing the inhaler could be difficult. You had to make sure that the device delivered an adequate dosage, and the mechanism required constant tinkering. Yet most surgeons stuck with it — or else they switched to chloroform, which was found to be an even more powerful anesthetic, but posed its own problems. (An imprecise dosage killed people.) Faced with the complexities, they didn't give up; instead, they formed an entire new medical specialty — anesthesiology.

So what were the key differences? First, one combatted a visible and immediate problem (pain); the other combatted an invisible problem (germs) whose effects wouldn't be manifest until well after the operation. Second, although both made life better for patients, only one made life better for doctors. Anesthesia changed surgery from a brutal, time-pressured assault on a shrieking patient to a quiet, considered procedure. Listerism, by contrast, required the operator to work in a shower of carbolic acid. Even low dilutions burned the surgeons' hands. You can imagine why Lister's crusade might have been a tough sell.

This has been the pattern of many important but stalled ideas. They attack problems that are big but, to most people, invisible; and making them work can be tedious, if not outright painful. The global destruction wrought by a warming climate, the health damage from our over-sugared modern diet, the economic and social disaster of our trillion dollars in unpaid student debt — these things worsen imperceptibly every day. Meanwhile, the carbolic-acid remedies to them, all requiring individual sacrifice of one kind or another, struggle to get anywhere.

The global problem of death in childbirth is a pressing example. Every year, three hundred thousand

mothers and more than six million children die around the time of birth, largely in poorer countries. Most of these deaths are due to events that occur during or shortly after delivery. A mother may hemorrhage. She or her baby may suffer an infection. Many babies can't take their first breath without assistance, and newborns, especially those born small, have trouble regulating their body temperature after birth. Simple, lifesaving solutions have been known for decades. They just haven't spread.

Many solutions aren't ones you can try at home, and that's part of the problem. Increasingly, however, women around the world are giving

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birth in hospitals. In India, a government program offers mothers up to fourteen hundred rupees — more than what most Indians live on for a month — when they deliver in a hospital, and now, in many areas, the majority of births are in facilities. Death rates in India have fallen, but they're still ten times greater than in high-income countries like our own.

Not long ago, I visited a few community hospitals in north India, where just one-third of mothers received the medication recommended to prevent hemorrhage; less than ten per cent of the newborns were given adequate warming; and only four per cent of birth attendants washed their hands for vaginal examination and delivery. In an average childbirth, clinicians followed only about ten of twenty-nine basic recommended practices.

Here we are in the first part of the twenty-first century, and we're still trying to figure out how to get ideas from the first part of the twentieth century to take root. In the hopes of spreading safer childbirth practices, several colleagues and I have teamed up with the Indian government, the World Health Organization, the Gates Foundation, and Population Services International to create something called the BetterBirth Project. We're working in Uttar Pradesh, which is among India's poorest states. One afternoon in January, our team travelled a couple of hours from the

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state's capital, Lucknow, with its bleating cars and ramshackle shops, to a rural hospital surrounded by lush farmland and thatched-hut villages. Although the sun was high and the sky was clear, the temperature was near freezing. The hospital was a one-story concrete building painted goldenrod yellow. (Our research agreement required that I keep it unnamed.) The entrance is on

a dirt road lined with rows of motorbikes, the primary means of long-distance transportation. If an ambulance or an auto-rickshaw can't be found, women in labor sit sidesaddle on the back of a bike.

The hospital delivers three thousand newborns a year, a typical volume in India but one that would put it in the top fifth of American hospitals. Yet it had little of the amenities that you'd associate with a modern hospital. I met the physician in charge, a smart and capable internist in his early thirties who had trained in the capital. He was clean-shaven and buzz-cut, with an Argyle sweater, track shoes, and a habitual half smile. He told me, apologetically, that the hospital staff had no ability to do blood tests, to give blood transfusions, or to perform emergency obstetrics procedures such as Cesarean sections. There was no electricity during the day. There was certainly no heating, even though the temperature was barely forty degrees that day, and no air-conditioning, even though summer temperatures routinely reach a hundred degrees. There were two blood-pressure cuffs for the entire facility. The nurse's office in my neighborhood elementary school was better equipped.

The hospital was severely understaffed, too. The doctor said that half of the staff positions were vacant. To help with child deliveries for a local population of a quarter of a million people, the hospital had two nurses and one obstetrician, who happened to be his wife. The nurses, who had six months of childbirth training, did most of the deliveries, swapping shifts year-round. The obstetrician covered the outpatient clinic, and helped with complicated births whenever she was required, day or night. During holidays or sickness, the two nurses covered for each other, but, if no one was available, laboring women were either sent to another hospital, miles away, or an untrained assistant might be forced to step in.

It may be surprising that mothers are better off delivering in such places than at home in a village, but studies show a consistently higher survival rate when they do. The staff members I met in India had impressive experience. Even the youngest nurses had done more than a thousand child deliveries. They've seen and learned to deal with countless problems — a torn placenta, an umbilical cord wrapped around a baby's neck, a stuck shoulder. Seeing the daily heroism required to keep such places going, you feel foolish and ill-mannered asking how they could do things better.

But then we hung out in the wards for a while. In the delivery room, a boy had just been born. He and his mother were lying on a cot, bundled under woollen blankets, resting. The room was coffin-cold; I was having trouble feeling my toes. I tried to imagine what that baby must have felt like. Newborns have a high body-surface area and lose heat rapidly. Even in warm weather, hypothermia is common, and it makes newborns weak and less responsive, less able to breast-feed adequately and more prone to infection. I noticed that the boy was swaddled separately from his mother. Voluminous evidence shows that it is far better to place the child on the mother's chest or belly, skin to skin, so that the mother's body can regulate the baby's until it is ready to take over. Among small or premature babies, kangaroo care (as it is known) cuts mortality rates by a third.

So why hadn't the nurse swaddled the two together? She was a skilled and self-assured woman in her mid-thirties with twinkly eyes, a brown knit hat, and a wool sweater over her shalwar kameez. Resources clearly weren't the issue — kangaroo care costs nothing. Had she heard of it? Oh, yes, she said. She'd taken a skilled-birth-attendant class that taught it. Had she forgotten about it? No. She had actually offered to put the baby skin to skin with the mother, and showed me where she'd noted this in the record.

"The mother didn't want it," she explained. "She said she was too cold."

The nurse seemed to think it was strange that I was making such an issue of this. The baby was fine, wasn't he? And he was. He was sleeping sweetly, a tightly wrapped peanut with a scrunched brown face and his mouth in a lowercase "o."

But had his temperature been taken? It had not. The nurse said that she had been planning to do so. Our visit had disrupted her routine. Suppose she had, though, and his temperature was low. Would she have done anything differently? Would she have made the mom unswaddle the child and put him to her chest?

Everything about the life the nurse leads — the hours she puts in, the circumstances she endures, the satisfaction she takes in her abilities — shows that she cares. But hypothermia, like the germs that Lister wanted surgeons to battle, is invisible to her. We picture a blue child, suffering right before our eyes. That is not what hypothermia looks like. It is a child who is just a few degrees too cold, too sluggish, too slow to feed. It will be some time before the baby begins to lose weight, stops making urine, develops pneumonia or a bloodstream infection. Long before that happens — usually the morning after the delivery, perhaps the same night — the mother will have hobbled to an auto-rickshaw, propped herself beside her husband, held her new baby tight, and ridden the rutted roads home.

From the nurse's point of view, she'd helped bring another life into the world. If four per cent of the newborns later died at home, what could that possibly have to do with how she wrapped the mother and child? Or whether she washed her hands before putting on gloves? Or whether the blade with which she cut the umbilical cord was sterilized?

We're infatuated with the prospect of technological solutions to these problems — baby warmers, say. You can still find high-tech incubators in rural hospitals that sit mothballed because a replacement part wasn't available, or because there was no electricity for them. In recent years, though, engineers have produced designs specifically for the developing world. Dr. Steven Ringer, a neonatologist and BetterBirth leader, was an adviser for a team that made a cheap, ingenious, award-winning incubator from old car parts that are commonly available and easily replaced in low-income environments. Yet it hasn't taken off, either. "It's in more museums than delivery rooms," he laments.

As with most difficulties in global health care, lack of adequate technology is not the biggest problem. We already have a great warming technology: a mother's skin. But even in high-income countries we do not consistently use it. In the United States, according

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to Ringer, more than half of newborns needing intensive care arrive hypothermic. Preventing hypothermia is a perfect example of an unsexy task: it demands painstaking effort without immediate reward. Getting hospitals and birth attendants to carry out even a few of the tasks required for safer childbirth would save hundreds of thousands of lives. But how do we do that?

The most common approach to changing behavior is to say to people, "Please do X." Please warm the newborn. Please wash your hands. Please follow through on the twenty-seven other childbirth practices that you're not doing. This is what we say in the classroom, in instructional videos, and in public-service campaigns, and it works, but only up to a point.

Then, there's the law-and-order approach: "You must do X." We establish standards and regulations, and threaten to punish failures with fines,

suspensions, the revocation of licenses. Punishment can work. Behavioral economists have even quantified how averse people are to penalties. In experimental games, they will often quit playing rather than risk facing negative consequences. And that is the problem with threatening to discipline birth attendants who are taking difficult-to-fill jobs under intensely trying conditions. They'll quit.

The kinder version of "You must do X" is to offer incentives rather than penalties. Maybe we could pay birth attendants a bonus for every healthy child who makes it past a week of life. But then you think about how hard it would be to make a scheme like that work, especially in poor settings. You'd need a sophisticated tracking procedure, to make sure that people aren't gaming the system, and complex statistical calculations, to take prior risks into account. There's also the impossible question of how you split the reward among all the people involved. How much should the community health worker who provided the prenatal care get? The birth attendant who handled the first twelve hours of labor? The one who came on duty and handled the delivery? The doctor who was called in when things got complicated? The pharmacist who stocked the antibiotic that the child required?

Besides, neither penalties nor incentives achieve what we're really after: a system and a culture where X is what people do, day in and day out, even when no one is watching. "You must" rewards mere compliance. Getting to "X is what we do" means establishing X as the norm. And that's what we want: for skin-to-skin warming, hand washing, and all the other lifesaving practices of childbirth to be, quite simply, the norm.

To create new norms, you have to understand people's existing norms and barriers to change. You have to understand what's getting in their way. So what about just working with health-care workers, one by one, to do just that? With the BetterBirth Project, we wondered, in particular, what would happen if we hired a cadre of childbirth-improvement workers to visit birth attendants and hospital leaders, show them why and how to follow a checklist of essential practices, understand their difficulties and objections, and help them practice doing things differently. In essence, we'd give them mentors.

The experiment is just getting under way. The project has recruited only the first few of a hundred or so workers whom we are sending out to hospitals across six regions of Uttar Pradesh in a trial that will involve almost two hundred thousand births over two years. There's no certainty that our approach will succeed. But it seemed worth trying.

Reactions that I've heard both abroad and at home have been interestingly divided. The most common objection is that, even if it works, this kind of one-on-one, on-site mentoring "isn't scalable." But that's one thing it surely is. If the intervention saves as many mothers and newborns as we're hoping — about a thousand lives in the course of a year at the target hospitals — then all that need be done is to hire and develop similar cadres of childbirth-improvement workers for other places around the country and potentially the world. To many people, that doesn't sound like much of a solution. It would require broad mobilization, substantial expense, and perhaps even the development of a new profession. But, to combat

the many antisepsis-like problems in the world, that's exactly what has worked. Think about the creation of anesthesiology: it meant doubling the number of doctors in every operation, and we went ahead and did so. To reduce illiteracy, countries, starting with our own, built schools, trained professional teachers, and made education free and compulsory for all children. To improve farming, governments have sent hundreds of thousands of agriculture extension agents to visit farmers across America and every corner of the world and teach them up-to-date methods for increasing their crop yields. Such programs have been extraordinarily effective. They have cut the global illiteracy rate from one in three adults in 1970 to one in six today, and helped give us a Green Revolution that saved more than a billion people from starvation.

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IN THE ERA OF THE IPHONE, FACEBOOK, AND TWITTER, WE'VE BECOME ENAMORED OF IDEAS THAT SPREAD AS EFFORTLESSLY AS ETHER. WE WANT FRICTIONLESS, "TURNKEY" SOLUTIONS TO THE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES OF THE WORLD — HUNGER, DISEASE, POVERTY.

solutions to the major difficulties of the world — hunger, disease, poverty. We prefer instructional videos to teachers, drones to troops, incentives to institutions. People and institutions can feel messy and anachronistic. They introduce, as the engineers put it, uncontrolled variability.

But technology and incentive programs are not enough. "Diffusion is essentially a social process through which people talking to people

spread an innovation," wrote Everett Rogers, the great scholar of how new ideas are communicated and spread. Mass media can introduce a new idea to people. But, Rogers showed, people follow the lead of other people they know and trust when they decide whether to take it up. Every change requires effort, and the decision to make that effort is a social process.

This is something that salespeople understand well. I once asked a pharmaceutical rep how he persuaded doctors — who are notoriously stubborn — to adopt a new medicine. Evidence is not remotely enough, he said, however strong a case you may have. You must also apply "the rule of seven touches." Personally "touch" the doctors seven times, and they will come to know you; if they know you, they might trust you; and, if they trust you, they will change. That's why he stocked doctors' closets with free drug samples in person. Then he could poke his head around the corner and ask, "So how did your daughter Debbie's soccer game go?" Eventually, this can become "Have you seen this study on our new drug? How about giving it a try?" As the rep had recognized, human interaction is the key force in overcoming resistance and speeding change.

In 1968, *The Lancet* published the results of a modest trial of what is now regarded as among the most important medical advances of the twentieth century. It wasn't a new drug or vaccine or operation. It was basically a

solution of sugar, salt, and water that you could make in your kitchen. The researchers gave the solution to victims of a cholera outbreak in Dhaka, the capital of what is now Bangladesh, and the results were striking.

Cholera is a violent and deadly diarrheal illness, caused by the bacterium *Vibrio cholera*, which the victim usually ingests from contaminated water. The bacteria secrete a toxin that triggers a rapid outpouring of fluid into the intestine. The body, which is sixty per cent water, becomes like a sponge being wrung out. The fluid pouring out is a cloudy white, likened to the runoff of washed rice. It produces projectile vomiting and explosive diarrhea. Children can lose a third of their body's water in less than twenty-four hours, a fatal volume. Drinking water to replace the fluid loss is ineffective, because the intestine won't absorb it. As a result, mortality commonly reached seventy per cent or higher. During the nineteenth century, cholera pandemics killed millions across Asia, Europe, Africa, and North America. The disease was dubbed the Blue Death because of the cyanotic blue-gray color of the skin from extreme dehydration.

In 1906, a partially effective treatment was found: intravenous fluid solutions reduced mortality to thirty per cent. Prevention was the most effective approach. Modern sewage and water treatment eliminated the disease in affluent countries. Globally, though, millions of children continued to die from diarrheal illness each year. Even if victims made it to a medical facility, the needles, plastic tubing, and litres of intravenous fluid required for treatment were expensive, in short supply, and dependent on medical workers who were themselves in short supply, especially in outbreaks that often produced thousands of victims.

Then, in the nineteen-sixties, scientists discovered that sugar helps the gut absorb fluid. Two American researchers, David Nalin and Richard Cash, were in Dhaka during a cholera outbreak. They decided to test the scientific findings, giving victims an oral rehydration solution containing sugar as well as salt. Many people doubted that victims could drink enough of it to restore their fluid losses, typically ten to twenty litres a day. So the researchers confined the Dhaka trial to twenty-nine patients. The subjects proved to have no trouble drinking enough to reduce or even eliminate the need for intravenous fluids, and none of them died.

Three years later, in 1971, an Indian physician named Dilip Mahalanabis was directing medical assistance at a West Bengal camp of three hundred and fifty thousand refugees from Bangladesh's war of independence when cholera struck. Intravenous-fluid supplies ran out. Mahalanabis instructed his team to try the Dhaka solution. Just 3.6 per cent died, an unprecedented reduction from the usual thirty per cent. The solution was actually better than intravenous fluids. If cholera victims were alert, able to drink, and supplied with enough of it, they could almost always save their own lives.

One might have expected people to clamor for the recipe after these results were publicized. Oral rehydration solution seems like ether: a miraculous fix for a vivid, immediate, and terrifying problem. But it wasn't like ether at all.

To understand why, you have to imagine having a child throwing up and pouring out diarrhea like you've never seen before. Making her

drink seems only to provoke more vomiting. Chasing the emesis and the diarrhea seems both torturous and futile. Many people's natural inclination is to not feed the child anything.

Furthermore, why believe that this particular mixture of sugar and salt would be any different from water or anything else you might have tried? And it is particular. Throw the salt concentration off by a couple of teaspoons and the electrolyte imbalance could be dangerous. The child must also keep drinking the stuff even after she feels better, for as long as the diarrhea lasts, which is up to five days. Nurses routinely got these steps wrong. Why would villagers do any better?

A decade after the landmark findings, the idea remained stalled. Nothing much had changed. Diarrheal disease remained the world's biggest killer of children under the age of five.

In 1980, however, a Bangladeshi nonprofit organization called BRAC decided to try to get oral rehydration therapy adopted nationwide. The campaign required reaching a mostly illiterate population. The most recent public-health campaign — to teach family planning — had been deeply unpopular. The messages the campaign needed to spread were complicated.

Nonetheless, the campaign proved remarkably successful. A gem of a book published in Bangladesh, "A Simple Solution," tells the story. The organization didn't launch a mass-media campaign — only twenty per cent of the population had a radio, after all. It attacked the problem in a way that is routinely dismissed as impractical and inefficient: by going door to door, person by person, and just talking.

It started with a pilot project that set out to reach some sixty thousand women in six hundred villages. The logistics were daunting. Who, for instance, would do the teaching? How were those workers going to travel? How was their security to be assured? The BRAC leaders planned the best they could and then made adjustments on the fly.

They recruited teams of fourteen young women, a cook, and a male supervisor, figuring that the supervisor would protect them from others as they travelled, and the women's numbers would protect them from the supervisor. They travelled on foot, pitched camp near each village, fanned out door to door, and stayed until they had talked to women in every hut. They worked long days, six days a week. Each night after dinner, they held a meeting to discuss what went well and what didn't and to share ideas on how to do better. Leaders periodically debriefed them, as well.

The workers were only semi-literate, but they helped distill their sales script into seven easy-to-remember messages: for instance, severe diarrhea leads to death from dehydration; the signs of dehydration include dry tongue, sunken eyes, thirst, severe weakness, and reduced urination; the way to treat dehydration is to replace salt and water lost from the body, starting with the very first loose stool; a rehydration solution provides the most effective way to do this. BRAC's scientists had to figure out how the workers could teach the recipe for the solution. Villagers had no precise measuring implements — spoons were locally made in nonstandard sizes. The leaders considered issuing special measuring spoons with the recipe on the handle. But these would be costly; most people couldn't read the

recipe; and how were the spoons to be replaced when lost? Eventually, the team hit upon using finger measures: a fistful of raw sugar plus a three-finger pinch of salt mixed in half a “seer” of water — a pint measure commonly used by villagers when buying milk and oil. Tests showed that mothers could make this with sufficient accuracy.

Initially, the workers taught up to twenty mothers per day. But monitors visiting the villages a few weeks later found that the quality of teaching suffered on this larger scale, so the workers were restricted to ten households a day. Then a new salary system was devised to pay each worker according to how many of the messages the mothers retained when the monitor followed up. The quality of teaching improved substantially. The field workers soon realized that having the mothers make the solution themselves was more effective than just showing them. The workers began looking for diarrhea cases when they arrived in a village, and treating them to show how effective and safe the remedy was. The scientists also investigated various questions that came up, such as whether clean water was required. (They found that, although boiled water was preferable, contaminated water was better than nothing.)

Early signs were promising. Mothers seemed to retain the key messages. Analysis of their sugar solutions showed that three-quarters made them properly, and just four in a thousand had potentially unsafe salt levels. So BRAC and the Bangladeshi government took the program nationwide. They hired, trained, and deployed thousands of workers region by region. The effort was, inevitably, imperfect. But, by going door to door through more than seventy-five thousand villages, they showed twelve million families how to save their children.

The program was stunningly successful. Use of oral rehydration therapy skyrocketed. The knowledge became self-propagating. The program had changed the norms.

Coaxing villagers to make the solution with their own hands and explain the messages in their own words, while a trainer observed and guided them, achieved far more than any public-service ad or instructional video could have done. Over time, the changes could be sustained with television and radio, and the growth of demand led to the development of a robust market for manufactured oral rehydration salt packets. Three decades later, national surveys have found that almost ninety per cent of children with severe diarrhea were given the solution. Child deaths from diarrhea plummeted more than eighty per cent between 1980 and 2005.

As other countries adopted Bangladesh’s approach, global diarrheal deaths dropped from five million a year to two million, despite a fifty-per-cent increase in the world’s population during the past three

COAXING VILLAGERS TO MAKE THE SOLUTION WITH THEIR OWN HANDS AND EXPLAIN THE MESSAGES IN THEIR OWN WORDS, WHILE A TRAINER OBSERVED AND GUIDED THEM, ACHIEVED FAR MORE THAN ANY PUBLIC-SERVICE AD OR INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO COULD HAVE DONE.

decades. Nonetheless, only a third of children in the developing world receive oral rehydration therapy. Many countries tried to implement at arm's length, going "low touch," without sandals on the ground. As a recent study by the Gates Foundation and the University of Washington has documented, those countries have failed almost entirely. People talking to people is still how the world's standards change.

Surgeons finally did upgrade their antiseptic standards at the end of the nineteenth century. But, as is often the case with new ideas, the effort required deeper changes than anyone had anticipated. In their blood-slick, viscera-encrusted black coats, surgeons had seen themselves as warriors doing hemorrhagic battle with little more than their bare hands. A few pioneering Germans, however, seized on the idea of the surgeon as scientist. They traded in their black coats for pristine laboratory whites, refashioned their operating rooms to achieve the exacting sterility of a bacteriological lab, and embraced anatomic precision over speed.

The key message to teach surgeons, it turned out, was not how to stop germs but how to think like a laboratory scientist. Young physicians from America and elsewhere who went to Germany to study with its surgical luminaries became fervent converts to their thinking and their standards. They returned as apostles not only for the use of antiseptic practice (to kill germs) but also for the much more exacting demands of aseptic practice (to prevent germs), such as wearing sterile gloves, gowns, hats, and masks. Proselytizing through their own students and colleagues, they finally spread the ideas worldwide.

In childbirth, we have only begun to accept that the critical practices aren't going to spread themselves. Simple "awareness" isn't going to solve anything. We need our sales force and our seven easy-to-remember messages. And in many places around the world the concerted, person-by-person effort of changing norms is under way.

I recently asked BetterBirth workers in India whether they'd yet seen a birth attendant change what she does. Yes, they said, but they've found that it takes a while. They begin by providing a day of classroom training for birth attendants and hospital leaders in the checklist of practices to be followed. Then they visit them on site to observe as they try to apply the lessons.

Sister Seema Yadav, a twenty-four-year-old, round-faced nurse three years out of school, was one of the trainers. (Nurses are called "sisters" in India, a carryover from the British usage.) Her first assignment was to follow a thirty-year-old nurse with vastly more experience than she had. Watching the nurse take a woman through labor and delivery, she saw how little of the training had been absorbed. The room had not been disinfected; blood from a previous birth remained in a bucket. When the woman came in — moaning, contractions speeding up — the nurse didn't check her vital signs. She didn't wash her hands. She prepared no emergency supplies. After delivery, she checked the newborn's temperature with her hand, not a thermometer. Instead of warming the baby against the mother's skin, she handed the newborn to the relatives.

When Sister Seema pointed out the discrepancy between the teaching and the practice, the nurse was put out. She gave many reasons that steps were missed — there was no time, they were swamped with deliveries, there was seldom a thermometer at hand, the cleaners never did their job. Sister Seema — a cheerful, bubbly, fast talker — took her to the cleaner on duty and together they explained why cleaning the rooms between deliveries was so important. They went to the medical officer in charge and asked for a thermometer to be supplied. At her second and third visits, disinfection seemed more consistent. A thermometer had been found in a storage closet. But the nurse still hadn't changed much of her own routine.

By the fourth or fifth visit, their conversations had shifted. They shared cups of chai and began talking about why you must wash hands even if you wear gloves (because of holes in the gloves and the tendency to touch equipment without them on), and why checking blood pressure matters (because hypertension is a sign of eclampsia, which, when untreated, is a common cause of death among pregnant women). They learned a bit about each other, too. Both turned out to have one child — Sister Seema a four-year-old boy, the nurse an eight-year-old girl. The nurse lived in the capital, a two-hour bus ride away. She was divorced, living with her mother, and struggled with the commute. She'd been frustrated not to find a hospital posting in the city. She worked for days at a stretch, sleeping on a cot when she got a break. Sister Seema commiserated, and shared her own hopes for her family and her future. With time, it became clearer to the nurse that Sister Seema was there only to help and to learn from the experience herself. They even exchanged mobile-phone numbers and spoke between visits. When Sister Seema didn't have the answer to a question, she made sure she got one.

Soon, she said, the nurse began to change. After several visits, she was taking temperatures and blood pressures properly, washing her hands, giving the necessary medications — almost everything. Sister Seema saw it with her own eyes.

She'd had to move on to another pilot site after that, however. And although the project is tracking the outcomes of mothers and newborns, it will be a while before we have enough numbers to know if a difference has been made. So I got the nurse's phone number and, with a translator to help with the Hindi, I gave her a call.

It had been four months since Sister Seema's visit ended. I asked her whether she'd made any changes. Lots, she said.

"What was the most difficult one?" I asked.

"Washing hands," she said. "I have to do it so many times!"

"What was the easiest?"

"Taking the vital signs properly." Before, she said, "we did it haphazardly." Afterward, "everything became much more systematic."

She said that she had eventually begun to see the effects. Bleeding after delivery was reduced. She recognized problems earlier. She rescued a baby who wasn't breathing. She diagnosed eclampsia in a mother and treated it. You could hear her pride as she told her stories.

Many of the changes took practice for her, she said. She had to learn, for instance, how to have all the critical supplies — blood-pressure cuff, thermometer, soap, clean gloves, baby respiratory mask, medications — lined up and ready for when she needed them; how to fit the use of them into her routine; how to convince mothers and their relatives that the best thing for a child was to be bundled against the mother's skin. But, step by step, Sister Seema had helped her to do it. "She showed me how to get things done practically," the nurse said.

"Why did you listen to her?" I asked. "She had only a fraction of your experience."

In the beginning, she didn't, the nurse admitted. "The first day she came, I felt the workload on my head was increasing." From the second time, however, the nurse began feeling better about the visits. She even began looking forward to them.

"Why?" I asked.

All the nurse could think to say was "She was nice."

"She was nice?"

"She smiled a lot."

"That was it?"

"It wasn't like talking to someone who was trying to find mistakes," she said. "It was like talking to a friend."

That, I think, was the answer. Since then, the nurse had developed her own way of explaining why newborns needed to be warmed skin to skin. She said that she now tells families, "Inside the uterus, the baby is very warm. So when the baby comes out it should be kept very warm. The mother's skin does this."

I hadn't been sure if she was just telling me what I wanted to hear. But when I heard her explain how she'd put her own words to what she'd learned, I knew that the ideas had spread. "Do the families listen?" I asked.

"Sometimes they don't," she said. "Usually, they do."



QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Gawande's essay proceeds as a series of case examples. He begins with a case in which he compares the spread of anesthesia and antisepsis. Why do you think he begins with these? What does his introduction of these two case examples allow him to do before he goes on to the longer cases involving childbirth and cholera?
2. After you've read the essay, go back to it for a second reading with Gawande's question from his first paragraph in mind: "Why do some innovations spread so swiftly and others so slowly?" Take notes or annotate the essay as you reread. Now that you've had an opportunity to reread "Slow Ideas," what would you say to someone who hasn't read it about how to speed ideas that don't spread quickly? What solutions does Gawande offer after his explanations of the four examples — anesthesia, antisepsis, cholera, and

childbirth — that he presents? What order of priority might he give his solutions? How would you explain such an order based on what you've learned from his cases?

3. Gawande is a surgeon, a writer, and a teacher at a teaching hospital. We can think of this essay as Gawande the research physician writing to teach us. We might claim that he expects us to learn about innovations and why some stick and others don't, but we might also claim that he expects us to come away from his essay with lessons about best practices for teaching and learning. In order for innovations to stick, people have to be taught and they have to learn. This much is true of all the case examples he presents.

Working from both his childbirth and cholera examples, what would you say he's arguing for as best teaching practices for change? What would you argue, then, are his claims about the best conditions for learning? Be sure to work closely from both of these case examples, referring to them when it's useful to your own arguments.

4. Step back from Gawande's essay after you've reread it. Think of it as purposeful in its arguments, examples, and structure. For this assignment, focus on the structure of his essay and the ways that it could be said to contribute to his arguments. To do this, circle or mark what you see as the major chunks or movements. There are breaks in the text, so you might begin with those, but you shouldn't limit yourself to them. Give the major chunks or movements names or labels so that you can refer to them easily. What are they? How would you describe the structure or organization of Gawande's essay? How would you say that the structure contributes to his arguments about innovations that stick and those that don't?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. As we said earlier, Gawande's essay can be thought of as a teaching tool. Gawande has things for us to learn about innovation and change in medical practices. He also has things for us to learn about the teaching and learning that made innovation and successful change possible in life-and-death situations. This assignment invites you to write about Gawande's arguments for best practices in teaching for innovation and change and to situate those practices in the conditions for learning that you might call necessary or at least helpful to the success of the teaching.

When you reread "Slow Ideas," mark the moments when Gawande seems to be drawing lessons about best teaching practices from his case examples. It might be that the teaching practices are specific to the cases, or it might be that he's making larger claims about what's effective for teaching others. You'll have to decide how to situate his claims for best teaching practices, but you should at least situate them in the conditions that seem to be necessary for learning to occur. What is it, in other words, about learners and their situations that has to be present for the best teaching practices to take hold?

Write an essay in which you make a case for what you think Gawande is saying about the best teaching practices for supporting others to innovate and change. Work closely from Gawande's case examples and situate your thinking in the conditions for learning that seem to be necessary for the best practices to work, to take hold.

2. This assignment is an invitation to take up Gawande's project by doing research of your own on innovations that have spread quickly and others that have not. You'll need to identify two or three innovations that interest you and that have spread fairly quickly. You'll also need to identify two or three innovations that haven't spread quickly. It can certainly be the case that the ones that didn't spread quickly took hold after a while. You'll have to decide on the cases that you present to test Gawande's ideas about why some innovations spread quickly and others don't.

Once you've identified cases of innovations that spread quickly and cases of those that didn't, you'll need to dig into them through research. You'll want to imagine that your readers don't know what you do about the case examples, so you'll be writing partly as a researcher presenting the history of the innovations and partly as an essayist presenting complex innovations in a handful of paragraphs that describe and summarize them for readers. Before you present your case examples in writing, you'll want to study the ways Gawande presents his examples so you can follow his lead in terms of writing strategies.

Write an essay in which you present at least one example each of fast- and slow-spreading innovations. What are the reasons that your quickly spreading example(s) spread so swiftly? What are the reasons that your slow-spreading innovation(s) didn't take hold? What kinds of teaching and learning were involved in the spreading of the innovations? Do the teaching and learning involved fit Gawande's thinking about best practices for teaching others to innovate and change?

3. Imagine that you're writing this essay for others who haven't read "Slow Ideas." Take up Gawande's question, "Why do some innovations spread so swiftly and others so slowly?" and write an essay in which you answer this question. Work closely from all of Gawande's case examples. You'll want to give your readers substantial descriptions of each of his case examples in your own words, and you'll also want to comment on each, as he does, to point out the teaching and the procedures that enabled others to adopt the innovations and to change. Finally, you'll want to be sure to account for what gets in the way of innovations' spreading by weaving those obstacles into your retellings of his cases as he does.
4. What gets in the way of innovations' spreading quickly? Gawande introduces us to some of his ideas about this early on in his essay when he's writing about the spread of anesthesia and antisepsis, but he also leaves work for us to do as readers on this question when he writes about childbirth and cholera. Write an essay in which you work from Gawande's case examples on

childbirth and cholera to test his ideas in the beginning pages of his essay on the things that get in the way of innovations and change. What do you see in these two cases that he thinks of as patterns of “important but stalled ideas”? What else do you learn from these cases that doesn’t seem to fit these patterns or that seems unique to the specific case examples?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Science writing has been said to be an impossible practice. To understand what a scientist understands, you have to *be* a scientist — to have that training and to be similarly engaged in the laboratory or in the field. How, then, can a science writer prepare a general audience to understand advanced research?

Read Anna Tsing’s essay “The Mushroom at the End of the World” (p. 581) alongside the work of Atul Gawande. You might best begin by thinking about how, as writers, they have different methods and styles, different techniques — different ways of addressing a reader, providing engagement and explanation, building bridges. Choose two or three distinctive and characteristic examples from each text.

Write an essay where you think through these examples for someone, like yourself, beginning a career as a scholar and a writer. What are the important lessons to be learned?

2. In “Arts of the Contact Zone” (p. 454), Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.” Atul Gawande, in “Slow Ideas,” chronicles the ways that lifesaving innovations and changes for childbirth in India and the treatment of cholera in Bangladesh take hold. At one point in his essay, he writes that the physicians involved in these projects want to change systems in cultures so that particular practices and treatments become daily routines or the norm. “To create new norms,” he writes, “you have to understand people’s existing norms and barriers to change” (p. 331).

Pratt might argue that those involved in the childbirth and cholera projects interacted in a context of “highly asymmetrical relations of power,” where the health-care providers in India and Bangladesh hold the dominant position, trying to get medical treatments to take hold in systems in cultures where neither incentives nor penalties work.

Write an essay in which you consider how Pratt’s concept of the contact zone might be useful in helping us understand the ways that change came about in childbirth practices in India and the treatment of cholera in Bangladesh. What might be the “autoethnographic texts” produced during the evolutions of these changes, and how might you say that the caregivers, including Gawande, learned to read them? And, finally, what conclusions might you draw about Gawande’s understanding of systemic or cultural change as the development of social and intellectual understanding in a contact zone?



ROXANE Gay

Roxane Gay (b. 1974) is the bestselling author of two short story collections *Ayiti* (2011) and *Difficult Women* (2017); a novel, *An Untamed State* (2014); an essay collection, *Bad Feminist* (2014); a memoir, *Hunger* (2017); and a comic book, *World of Wakanda* for Marvel (2016). A contributing opinion writer for the *New York Times*, she has had her work published in *Tin House*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and various other literary magazines and journals. Gay is wide-ranging in her choice of content, writing prolifically about feminism, women, bodies, politics, assault, exercise, relationships, and more. Her expertise spans a multitude of topics and thousands of pages.

Gay writes and speaks about her life of contradictions, the one in which she does not fit conventional narratives of blackness, the one in which she has identified as lesbian despite remaining attracted to men. She describes her book of essays, *Bad Feminist*—from which the following piece “How to Be Friends with Another Woman” comes—as a reconciliation of contradictions. She wants readers to question the world and feminism while “admitting to our humanity and enjoying sometimes inappropriate things.” Gay’s forgiving spirit extends throughout her writing. She wants feminists to critically consume pop songs and television and be able to do so without shame.

“How to Be Friends with Another Woman” is short and to the point. Unlike a traditional essay, the piece is an itemized list of advice Gay has accrued over her years of being friends with other women. As the title suggests, she is prescriptive in her instruction but also admits to being a woman who once struggled to be friends with women; she is “sorry to judge.” Gay’s list is not exhaustive, but it is a start, one that looks radically different from media portrayals of friendships between women as catty, toxic, steeped in gossip and ill will. Gay writes, “Don’t tear other women down, because even if they’re not your friends, they are women and this is just as important.” Gay seems to say, *women support women*. Gay seems to say, *here’s how*.

Bad
Feminist
Roxane
Gay

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How to Be Friends with Another Woman

1. Abandon the cultural myth that all female friendships must be bitchy, toxic, or competitive. This myth is like heels and purses—pretty but designed to SLOW women down.
- 1A. This is not to say women aren't bitches or toxic or competitive sometimes but rather to say that these are not defining characteristics of female friendship, especially as you get older.
- 1B. If you find that you are feeling bitchy, toxic, or competitive toward the women who are supposed to be your closest friends, look at why and figure out how to fix it and/or find someone who can help you fix it.
2. A lot of ink is given over to mythologizing female friendships as curious, fragile relationships that are always intensely fraught. Stop reading writing that encourages this mythology.
3. If you are the kind of woman who says, "I'm mostly friends with guys," and act like you're proud of that, like that makes you closer to being a man or something and less of a woman as if being a woman is a bad thing, see Item 1B. It's okay if most of your friends are guys, but if you champion this as a commentary on the nature of female friendships, well, soul-search a little.
- 3A. If you feel like it's hard to be friends with women, consider that maybe women aren't the problem. Maybe it's just you.
- 3B. I used to be this kind of woman. I'm sorry to judge.
4. Sometimes, your friends will date people you cannot stand. You can either be honest about your feelings or you can lie. There are good reasons for both. Sometimes you will be the person dating someone your friends cannot stand. If your man or woman is a scrub, just own it so you and your friends can talk about more interesting things. My go-to explanation is "I am dating an asshole because I'm lazy." You are welcome to borrow it.
5. Want nothing but the best for your friends because when your friends are happy and successful, it's probably going to be easier for you to be happy.
- 5A. If you're having a rough go of it and a friend is having the best year ever and you need to think some dark thoughts about that, do it alone, with your therapist, or in your diary so that when you actually see your friend, you can avoid the myth discussed in Item 1.
- 5B. If you and your friend(s) are in the same field and you can collaborate or help each other, do this without shame. It's not your fault your friends are awesome. Men invented nepotism and practically live by it. It's okay for women to do it too.

- 5C. Don't tear other women down, because even if they're not your friends, they are women and this is just as important. This is not to say you cannot criticize other women, but understand the difference between criticizing constructively and tearing down cruelly.
- 5D. Everybody gossips, so if you are going to gossip about your friends, at least make it fun and interesting. As a corollary, never say "I never lie" or "I never gossip" because you are lying.
- 5E. Love your friends' kids even if you don't want or like children. Just do it.
6. Tell your friends the hard truths they need to hear. They might get pissed about it, but it's probably for their own good. Once, my best friend told me to get my love life together and demanded an action plan, and it was irritating but also useful.
- 6A. Don't be totally rude about truth telling, and consider how much truth is actually needed to get the job done. Finesse goes a long way.
- 6B. These conversations are more fun when preceded by an emphatic "GIRL."
7. Surround yourself with women you can get sloppy drunk with who won't draw stupid things on your face if you pass out, and who will help you puke if you overcelebrate, and who will also tell you if you get sloppy drunk too much or behave badly when you are sloppy drunk.
8. Don't flirt, have sex, or engage in emotional affairs with your friends' significant others. This shouldn't need to be said, but it needs to be said. That significant other is an asshole, and you don't want to be involved with an asshole who's used goods. If you want to be with an asshole, get a fresh asshole of your very own. They are abundant.
9. Don't let your friends buy ugly outfits or accessories you don't want to look at when you hang out. This is just common sense.
10. When something is wrong and you need to talk to your friends and they ask you how you are, don't say "Fine." They know you're lying and it irritates them and a lot of time is wasted with the back-and-forth of "Are you sure?" and "Yes?" and "Really?" and "I AM FINE." Tell your lady friends the truth so you can talk it out and either sulk companionably or move on to other topics.
11. If four people are dining, split the check evenly four ways. We are adults now. We don't need to add up what each person had anymore. If you're high rolling, just treat everyone and rotate who treats. If you're still in the broke stage, do what you have to do.
12. If a friend sends a crazy e-mail needing reassurance about love, life, family, or work, respond accordingly and in a timely manner even if it is just to say, "GIRL, I hear you." If a friend sends you like thirty crazy e-mails needing reassurance about the same damn

shit, be patient because one day that's going to be you tearing up Gmail with your drama.

13. My mother's favorite saying is "*Qui se ressemble s'assemble*." Whenever she didn't approve of who I was spending time with, she'd say this ominously. It means, essentially, you are whom you surround yourself with.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Reread Gay's text with an eye for form. What does the list structure accomplish? Why might Gay have chosen this form over a longer, more traditional essay with more overt opportunity for detail and nuance? Recall the title of Gay's piece: "How to Be Friends with Another Woman," and notice how it lives up to the title — nearly every point is prescriptive as opposed to descriptive. What are the advantages of writing in this way? What are the disadvantages? Does this form leave anyone behind? If so, who?
2. In addition to the content of the piece, consider the rhetorical choices Gay makes. Who is her intended audience? How does her use of pronouns impact the ways you read this text? Is it *for you* or *not for you*? How would the content and composition change if Gay's audience were different?
3. The title of Gay's book of essays, *Bad Feminist*, suggests that feminists, including Gay, are permitted a certain amount of forgiveness, a certain leeway in being bad at being feminists. She expresses the hope that feminists will continue to sing along to misogynistic top hits, while being critical consumers and recognizing that they are misogynistic. When Gay writes "bad" feminist, she seems to mean that feminists can be flexible. Are there any pieces of "bad" advice included in this piece? Can you find any instructions you would rewrite, based on your experience of womanhood or friendships with women? How can you make sense of Gay's desire to offer feminists some flexibility when faced with such a rigid set of rules about women?
4. Though the selection is short, Gay manages to incorporate a fair amount of dialogue in her thirteen points. Return to this piece, marking those moments of speech and thinking about how they function. Does a standard instruction manual include dialogue? Why bother to include it here? What purpose does it serve? What are the advantages of having speech punctuate this piece? And who does this dialogue belong to anyway? Is it Gay's speaking voice breaking through her more formal, published writing? Is it your voice? Cross out those exclamations and moments of speech. How does the essay change?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. It is easy to read Gay's text — she delights us with humor and speaks conversationally about a subject that seems accessible to many of us. But, of course, we can also learn a great deal from taking her writing seriously — not necessarily every single instruction, but rather the ways she invites us to think about gender. How is gender set up? What does it encourage and discourage us from doing?

Write an essay in which you consider Gay's text in terms of arguments about gender more broadly. What do these instructions imply about gender? What does Gay want us to see about women, femininity, men, and masculinity? Quote specific passages and be sure to explain what interpretative moves you have to make as a reader to get from your supporting quotations to Gay's arguments (or questions) about how gender works on us, with us, and against us.

2. A significant way to learn about Gay's piece, and about writing more generally, is to take on the style and form of the essay you are reading to understand for yourself as a writer what the form allows and makes possible. For this assignment, first consider the list form of Gay's work: How does she execute this form? What are some of the signature moves in the list form? How might you instruct someone else about how to "write like Roxane Gay" — or at least write like her in this particular piece?

Once you've given those questions some thought and taken some notes, design a list-form essay of your own. You might begin with the title "How to _____." Like Gay, you want to make a list of thirteen, or another number, of instructions about how to do this thing, and like Gay, you want your title to be something interesting and perhaps something one would not typically give instructions about. Also like Gay, you'll want your piece to delight its readers, but you will also want it to encourage your readers to consider larger cultural, philosophical, or political questions about our world today. After finishing your essay, compose a postscript in which you describe the process of writing it. What did you learn about the form? How do you measure your success in pulling off this alternative form?

3. Gay ends her piece on a particularly resonant note, writing:

My mother's favorite saying is "*Qui se ressemble s'assemble*." Whenever she didn't approve of who I was spending time with, she'd say this ominously. It means, essentially, you are whom you surround yourself with. (p. 345)

Here, Gay is sharing a personal story from her own upbringing, but she is also sharing a philosophical view (via her mother's expression). Spend some time with this idea. What do you think it really means that a person *is* who they surround themselves with? How have you seen this idea to be true in your

own experience? Are there ways you would complicate or challenge this idea? Think about your own life: Are you who you surround yourself with? And if you are, what does that mean for you? What questions and challenges does that pose, and what can you learn about yourself and others from thinking about your life through the lens of this philosophy?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. One way to think about Roxane Gay's "How to Be Friends with Another Woman" is to consider it formally, as a kind of alternative to the conventional essay. All writers think about form — they imagine the shape, tone, and approach they will take and its relationship to the thing they want to write about. This process is about being aware (as any dedicated writer is) of the connections between *what* you want to say or ask and *how* you want to say or ask it. There are many other authors gathered in this anthology (perhaps especially Gloria Anzaldúa, Susan Griffin, Aubrey Hirsch, Jenny Price, and Claudia Rankine) who might allow us to think through questions of nontraditional forms of writing. Consider another essay in this collection that you think approaches its subject through an unconventional form. Why would a writer who is taking on the subject(s) of that particular essay decide to approach it in an alternative way? What does the essay accomplish through the writer's formal choices? What is your experience of the formal choices as an active reader? And how might your experience be different if the essay were executed in a more traditional way?

Once you have thought through these questions, write an essay in which you consider this larger philosophical question about writing. What is the relationship between content and form? You'll want to cite passages from both Gay's essay and at least one other essay in this collection so you can point to actual examples of this relationship. You'll also want to consider yourself as writer. What can you learn from thinking about these questions?

2. For this assignment, we invite you to think about an essay you've found interesting in this anthology that is vastly different from Gay's — perhaps an essay like Michel Foucault's "Panopticism" (p. 291) or Ruth Behar's "The Vulnerable Observer" (p. 109). Reread that particular essay, identify the essential points the essay makes, and then rewrite the essay in a nonconventional form — perhaps in the form of a numbered list (like Price or Gay), or in letter form (like Coates), or in poetry (like Rankine, Long Soldier, or Sharif). Once you have drafted this essay, add a postscript in which you consider these questions: How did the particular content of the first essay work with/against the form of the second one of your choosing? What did you learn about form and content in composing this essay in a new way? What did you see about both essays that you perhaps did not see before?

3. Roxane Gay has been called, in many contexts, one of the most important voices of our time. Write an essay that you title "Important and Powerful Voices." Begin by considering why (whether you agree or not) Gay might be thought about in this way? What is important and powerful about her voice? Why might so many people need and want to hear what she has to say? Then move to another selection from this anthology by an author whom *you* consider an important and powerful voice as well. Why did you choose this piece? In what ways does this other writer's voice connect to or differ from Gay's? What story, together, do these two writers tell all of us about what we need to do, say, write, or think about?

SUSAN Griffin



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Susan Griffin (b. 1943) is a well-known and respected feminist writer, poet, essayist, lecturer, teacher, playwright, and filmmaker. She has published more than twenty books, including an Emmy Award-winning play, *Voices*, with a preface by Adrienne Rich (1975); three books of poetry, *Like the Iris of an Eye* (1976), *Unremembered Country* (1987), and *Bending Home: Selected and New Poems* (1998); and four books of nonfiction that have become key feminist texts, *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978), *Rape: The Power of Consciousness* (1979), *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (1981), and *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (1992). Her most recent books are *What Her Body Thought: A Journey into the Shadows* (1999), on her battle with illness; *The Book of the Courtesans: A Catalog of Their Virtues* (2001), which includes biographies of courtesans throughout history; *Wrestling with the Angel of Democracy: On Being an American Citizen* (2008), an examination of democratic ideals; and, with Karin Lofthus Carrington, *Transforming Terror: Remembering the Soul of the World* (2011), a meditation on the ways in which human interdependence and compassion can overcome violence.

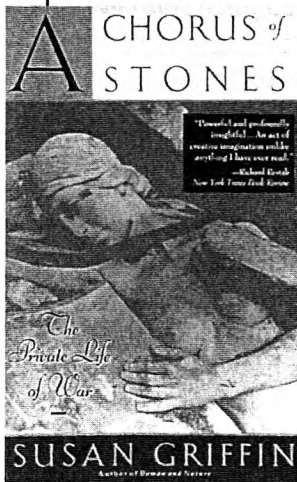
We've included here an abridged version of "Our Secret," which is taken from a chapter from Susan Griffin's moving and powerful book *A Chorus of Stones*, winner of the Bay Area Book Reviewers Association Award and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction. The book explores the connections between present and past, public life and private life, an individual life and the lives of others. Griffin writes, for example, "I do not see my life as separate from history. In my mind my family secrets mingle with the secrets of statesmen and bombers." In one section of the book, she writes of her mother's alcoholism and her father's response to it. In another, she writes of her paternal grandmother, who was banished from the family for reasons never spoken. Next to these, she thinks about Heinrich Himmler, head of the Nazi secret police, or Hugh Trenchard of the British Royal Air Force, who introduced the saturation bombing of cities and civilians to modern warfare, or Wernher von Braun and the development of rockets and rocketry. "As I held these [figures and scenes] in my mind," she writes, "a certain energy was generated between them. There were two subjects but one theme: denying and bearing witness."

A Chorus of Stones combines the skills of a careful researcher working with the documentary records of war, the imaginative powers of a novelist entering the lives and experiences of those long dead, and a poet's attention to language. It is a remarkable piece of writing, producing in its form and style the very experience of surprise and connectedness that Griffin presents as the product of her research. "It's not a historian's history," she once told an interviewer. "What's in it is true, but I think of it as a book that verges on myth and legend, because those are the ways we find the deepest meanings and significance of events."

Griffin's history is not a historian's history; her sociology is not a sociologist's; her psychology is not written in conventional forms or registers. She is actively engaged in the key research projects of our time, providing new knowledge and new ways of thinking and seeing, but she works outside the usual forms and boundaries of the academic disciplines. There are other ways of thinking about this, she seems to say. There are other ways to do this work. Her book on rape, for example, ends with a collage of women's voices, excerpts from public documents, and bits and pieces from the academy.

"Our Secret" has its own peculiar structure and features—the sections in italics, for example. As a piece of writing, it proceeds with a design that is not concerned to move quickly or efficiently from introduction to conclusion. It is, rather, a kind of collage or collection of stories, sketches, anecdotes, fragments.

While the sections in the essay are presented as fragments, the essay is not, however, deeply confusing or disorienting. The pleasure of the text, in fact, is moving from here to there, feeling a thread of connection at one point, being surprised by a new direction at another. The writing is careful, thoughtful, controlled, even if this is not the kind of essay that announces its thesis and then collects examples for support. It takes a different attitude toward examples—and toward the kind of thinking one might bring to bear in gathering them and thinking them through. As Griffin says, "The telling and hearing of a story is not a simple act." It is not simple and, as her writing teaches us, it is not straightforward. As you read this essay, think of it as a lesson in reading, writing, and thinking. Think of it as a lesson in working differently. And you might ask why it is that this kind of writing is seldom taught in school.



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Our Secret

The nucleus of the cell derives its name from the Latin nux, meaning nut. Like the stone in a cherry, it is found in the center of the cell, and like this stone, keeps its precious kernel in a shell.

She is across the room from me. I am in a chair facing her. We sit together in the late darkness of a summer night. As she speaks the space between us grows larger. She has entered her past. She is speaking of her childhood. Her father. The war. Did I know her father fought in the Battle of the Bulge? What was it for him, this great and terrible battle? She cannot say. He never spoke of it at home. They knew so little, her mother, her brothers, herself. Outside, the sea has disappeared. One finds the water now only by the city lights that cease to shine at its edges. California. She moved here with her family when her father became the commander of a military base. There were nuclear missiles standing just blocks from where she lived. But her father never spoke about them. Only after many years away from home did she learn what these weapons were.

The first guided missile is developed in Germany, during World War II. It is known as the Vergeltungswaffe, or the Vengeance weapon. Later, it will be called the V-1 rocket.

She is speaking of another life, another way of living. I give her the name Laura here. She speaks of the time after the war, when the cold war was just beginning. The way we are talking now, Laura tells me, was not possible in her family. I nod in recognition. Certain questions were never answered. She learned what not to ask. She begins to tell me a story. Once when she was six years old she went out with her father on a long trip. It was not even a year since the war ended. They were living in Germany.

They drove for miles and miles. Finally they turned into a small road at the edge of a village and drove through a wide gate in a high wall. The survivors were all gone. But there were other signs of this event beyond and yet still within her comprehension. Shoes in great piles. Bones. Women's hair, clothes, stains, a terrible odor. She began to cry a child's frightened tears and then to scream. She had no words for what she saw. Her father admonished her to be still. Only years later, and in a classroom, did she find out the name of this place and what had happened here.

The shell surrounding the nucleus is not hard and rigid; it is a porous membrane. These pores allow only some substances to pass through them, mediating the movement of materials in and out of the nucleus.

Often I have looked back into my past with a new insight only to find that some old, hardly recollected feeling fits into a larger pattern of meaning. Time can be measured in many ways. We see time as moving forward and hope that by our efforts this motion is toward improvement. When the atomic bomb exploded, many who survived the blast say time stopped with the flash of light and was held suspended until the ash began to descend. Now, in my mind, I can feel myself moving backward in time. I am as if on a train. And the train pushes into history. This history seems to exist somewhere, waiting, a foreign country behind a border and, perhaps, also inside me. From the windows of my train, I can see what those outside do not see. They do not see each other, or the whole landscape through which the track is laid. This is a straight track, but still there are bends to fit the shape of the earth. There are even circles. And returns.

The missile is guided by a programmed mechanism. There is no electronic device that can be jammed. Once it is fired it cannot stop.

It is 1945 and a film is released in Germany. This film has been made for other nations to see. On the screen a train pulls into a station. The train is full of children. A man in a uniform greets the children warmly as they step off the train. Then the camera cuts to boys and girls who are swimming. The boys and girls race to see who can reach the other side of the pool first. Then a woman goes to a post office. A man goes to a bank. Men and women sit drinking coffee at a cafe. The film is called *The Führer Presents the Jews with a City*. It has been made at Terezin concentration camp.

Through the pores of the nuclear membrane a steady stream of ribonucleic acid, RNA, the basic material from which the cell is made, flows out.

It is wartime and a woman is writing a letter. *Everyone is on the brink of starvation*, she says. In the right-hand corner of the page she has written *Nordhausen, Germany 1944*. She is writing to Hans. *Do you remember*, she asks, the day this war was declared? The beauty of the place. The beauty of the sea. *And I bathed in it that day, for the last time.*

In the same year, someone else is also writing a letter. In the right-hand corner he has put his name followed by a title. *Heinrich Himmler. Reichsführer, SS. Make no mention of the special treatment of the Jews*, he says, use only the words Transportation of the Jews toward the Russian East.

A few months later this man will deliver a speech to a secret meeting of leaders in the district of Posen. *Now you know all about it, and you will keep quiet*, he will tell them. Now we share a secret and *we should take our secret to our graves.*

The missile flies from three to four thousand feet above the earth and this makes it difficult to attack from the ground.

The woman who writes of starvation is a painter in her seventy-seventh year. She has lost one grandchild to this war. And a son to the war before. Both boys were named Peter. Among the drawings she makes which have already become famous: a terrified mother grasps a child, *Death Seizes Children*; an old man curls over the bent body of an old woman, *Parents*; a thin face emerges white from charcoal, *Beggars*.

A small but critical part of the RNA flowing out of the pores holds most of the knowledge issued by the nucleus. These threads of RNA act as messengers.

Encountering such images, one is grateful to be spared. But is one ever really free of the fate of others? I was born in 1943, in the midst of this war. And I sense now that my life is still bound up with the lives of those who lived and died in this time. Even with Heinrich Himmler. All the details of his existence, his birth, childhood, adult years, death, still resonate here on earth.

The V-1 rocket is a winged plane powered by a duct motor with a pulsating flow of fuel.

It is April 1943, Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, has gained control of the production of rockets for the Third Reich. The SS Totenkampf stand guard with machine guns trained at the entrance to a long tunnel, two miles deep, fourteen yards wide and ten yards high, sequestered in the Harz Mountains near Nordhausen. Once an old mining shaft, this tunnel serves now as a secret factory for the manufacture of V-1 and V-2 missiles. The guards aim their machine guns at the factory workers who are inmates of concentration camp Dora.

**I SENSE NOW THAT MY LIFE IS
STILL BOUND UP WITH THE LIVES
OF THOSE WHO LIVED AND DIED IN
THIS TIME. EVEN WITH HEINRICH
HIMMLER.**

Most of the RNA flowing out of the cell is destined for the construction of a substance needed to compensate for the continual wearing away of the cell.

It is 1925. Heinrich Himmler, who is now twenty-five years old, has been hired as a secretary by the chief of the Nazi Party in Landshut. He sits behind a small desk in a room overcrowded with party records, correspondence, and newspaper files. On the wall facing him he can see a portrait of Adolf Hitler. He hopes one day to meet the Führer. In anticipation of that day, while he believes no one watches, he practices speaking to this portrait.

It is 1922. Heinrich visits friends who have a three-year-old child. Before going to bed this child is allowed to run about naked. And this disturbs Heinrich. He writes in his diary, *One should teach a child a sense of shame.*

It is the summer of 1910. Heinrich begins his first diary. He is ten years old. He has just completed elementary school. His father tells him his childhood is over now. In the fall he will enter Wilhelms Gymnasium. There the grades he earns will determine his prospects for the future. From now on he must learn to take himself seriously.



Eight out of ten of the guided missiles will land within eight miles of their targets.

His father Gebhard is a schoolmaster. He knows the requirements. He provides the boy with pen and ink. Gebhard was once a tutor for Prince Heinrich of Wittelsbach. He has named his son Heinrich after this prince. He is grateful that the prince consented to be Heinrich's godparent. Heinrich is to write in his diary every day. Gebhard writes the first entry in his son's diary, to show the boy how it is to be done.

July 13, Departed at 11:50 and arrive safely on the bus in L. We have a very pretty house. In the afternoon we drink coffee at the coffee house.

I open the cover of the journal I began to keep just as I started my work on this book. I want to see what is on the first page. *It is here I begin a new life*, I wrote. Suffering many losses at once, I was alone and lonely. Yet suddenly I felt a new responsibility for myself. *The very act of keeping a journal*, I sensed, would help me into this life that would now be my own.

Inside the nucleus is the nucleolus where the synthesis of RNA takes place. Each nucleolus is filled with a small jungle of fern-like structures all of whose fronds and stalks move and rotate in perfect synchrony.

It is 1910. The twenty-second of July. Gebhard adds the words *first swim* to his son's brief entry, *thirteenth wedding anniversary of my dear parents*. 1911. Over several entries Heinrich lists each of thirty-seven times he takes a swim, in chronological order. *11:37 A.M. Departed for Lindau*. He does not write of his feelings. *August 8, Walk in the park*. Or dreams. *August 10, Bad weather*.

In the last few years I have been searching, though for what precisely I cannot say. Something still hidden which lies in the direction of Heinrich Himmler's life. I have been to Berlin and Munich on this search, and I have walked over the gravel at Dachau. Now as I sit here I read once again the fragments from Heinrich's boyhood diary that exist in English. I have begun to think of these words as ciphers. Repeat them to myself, hoping to find a door into the mind of this man, even as his character first forms so that I might learn how it is he becomes himself.

The task is not easy. The earliest entries in this diary betray so little. Like the words of a schoolboy commanded to write what the teacher

requires of him, they are wooden and stiff. The stamp of his father's character is so heavy on this language that I catch not even a breath of a self here. It is easy to see how this would be true. One simply has to imagine Gebhard standing behind Heinrich and tapping his foot.

His father must have loomed large to him. Did Gebhard lay his hand on Heinrich's shoulder? The weight of that hand would not be comforting. It would be a warning. A reminder. Heinrich must straighten up now and be still. Yet perhaps he turns his head. Maybe there is a sound outside. A bird. Or his brother Gebhard's voice. But from the dark form behind him he hears a name pronounced. This is his name, *Heinrich*. The sound rolls sharply off his father's tongue. He turns his head back. He does not know what to write. He wants to turn to this form and beseech him, but this man who is his father is more silent than stone. And now when Heinrich can feel impatience all around him, he wants to ask, *What should I write?* The edge of his father's voice has gotten sharper. *Why can't you remember?* Just write what happened yesterday. And make sure you get the date right. *Don't you remember?* We took a walk in the park together and we ran into the duchess. Be certain you spell her name correctly. And look here, you must get the title right. That is extremely important. Cross it out. Do it again. *The title.*

The boy is relieved. His mind has not been working. His thoughts were like paralyzed limbs, immobile. Now he is in motion again. He writes the sentences as they are dictated to him. *The park*. He crosses out the name. He writes it again. Spelling it right. *The duchess*. And his father makes one more correction. The boy has not put down the correct time for their walk in the park.

And who is the man standing behind? In a photograph I have before me of the aging Professor and Frau Himmler, as they pose before a wall carefully composed with paintings and family portraits, Frau Himmler adorned with a demure lace collar, both she and the professor smiling kindly from behind steel-rimmed glasses, the professor somewhat rounded with age, in a dark three-piece suit and polka-dot tie, looks so ordinary.

The missile carries a warhead weighing 1,870 pounds. It has three different fuses to insure detonation.

Ordinary. What an astonishing array of images hide behind this word. The ordinary is of course never ordinary. I think of it now as a kind of mask, not an animated mask that expresses the essence of an inner truth, but a mask that falls like dead weight over the human face, making flesh a stationary object. One has difficulty penetrating the heavy mask that Gebhard and his family wore, difficulty piercing through to the creatures behind.

It must not have been an easy task to create this mask. One detects the dimensions of the struggle in the advice of German child-rearing experts from this and the last century. *Crush the will*, they write. *Establish dominance. Permit no disobedience. Suppress everything in the child.*

I have seen illustrations from the books of one of these experts, perhaps the most famous of these pedagogues, Dr. Daniel Gottlieb Moritz Schreber. At first glance these pictures recall images of torture. But they are instead pictures of children whose posture or behavior is being corrected. A brace up the spine, a belt tied to a waist and the hair at the back of the neck so the child will be discouraged from slumping, a metal plate at the edge of a desk keeping the child from curling over her work, a child tied to a bed to prevent poor sleeping posture or masturbation. And there are other methods recommended in the text. An enema to be given before bedtime. The child immersed in ice-cold water up to the hips, before sleep.

The nightmare images of the German child-rearing practices that one discovers in this book call to mind the catastrophic events of recent German history. I first encountered this pedagogy in the writing of Alice Miller. At one time a psychoanalyst, she was haunted by the question, *What could make a person conceive the plan of gassing millions of human beings to death?* In her work, she traces the origins of this violence to childhood.

Of course there cannot be one answer to such a monumental riddle, nor does any event in history have a single cause. Rather a field exists, like a field of gravity that is created by the movements of many bodies. Each life is influenced and it in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is a cause is also an effect. Childhood experience is just one element in the determining field.

As a man who made history, Heinrich Himmler shaped many childhoods, including, in the most subtle of ways, my own. And an earlier history, a history of governments, of wars, of social customs, an idea of gender, the history of a religion leading to the idea of original sin, shaped Heinrich Himmler's childhood as certainly as any philosophy of child raising. One can take for instance any formative condition of his private life, the fact that he was a frail child, for example, favored by his mother, who could not meet masculine standards, and show that this circumstance derived its real meaning from a larger social system that gave inordinate significance to masculinity.

Yet to enter history through childhood experience shifts one's perspective not away from history but instead to an earlier time just before history has finally shaped us. Is there a child who existed before the conventional history that we tell of ourselves, one who, though invisible to us, still shapes events, even through this absence? How does our sense of history change when we consider childhood, and perhaps more important, why is it that until now we have chosen to ignore this point of origination, the birthplace and womb of ourselves, in our consideration of public events?

In the silence that reverberates around this question, an image is born in my mind. I can see a child's body, small, curled into itself, knees bent toward the chest, head bending softly into pillows and blankets, in a posture thought unhealthy by Dr. Schreber, hand raised to the face, delicate mouth making a circle around the thumb. There is comfort as well as sadness in this image. It is a kind of a self-portrait, drawn both from memory

and from a feeling that is still inside me. As I dwell for a moment with this image I can imagine Heinrich in this posture, silent, curled, fetal, giving comfort to himself.

But now, alongside this earlier image, another is born. It is as if these two images were twins, always traveling in the world of thought together. One does not come to mind without the other. In this second portrait, which is also made of feeling and memory, a child's hands are tied into mittens. And by a string extending from one of the mittens, her hand is tied to the bars of her crib. She is not supposed to be putting her finger in her mouth. And she is crying out in rage while she yanks her hand violently trying to free herself of her bonds.

To most of existence there is an inner and an outer world. Skin, bark, surface of the ocean open to reveal other realities. What is inside shapes and sustains what appears. So it is too with human consciousness. And yet the mind rarely has a simple connection to the inner life. At a certain age we begin to define ourselves, to choose an image of who we are. I am this and not that, we say, attempting thus to erase whatever is within us that does not fit our idea of who we should be. In time we forget our earliest selves and replace that memory with the image we have constructed at the bidding of others.

One can see this process occur in the language of Heinrich's diaries. If in the earliest entries, except for the wooden style of a boy who obeys authority, Heinrich's character is hardly apparent, over time this stilted style becomes his own. As one reads on, one no longer thinks of a boy who is forced to the task, but of a prudish and rigid young man.

In Heinrich's boyhood diaries no one has been able to find any record of rage or of events that inspire such rage. Yet one cannot assume from this evidence that such did not exist. His father would have permitted neither anger nor even the memory of it to enter these pages. That there must be no visible trace of resentment toward the parent was the pedagogy of the age. Dr. Schreber believed that children should learn to be grateful. The pain and humiliation children endure are meant to benefit them. The parent is only trying to save the child's soul.

Now, for different reasons, I too find myself on the track of a child's soul. The dimensions of Heinrich Himmler's life have put me on this track. I am trying to grasp the inner state of his being. For a time the soul ceased to exist in the modern mind. One thought of a human being as a kind of machine, or as a cog in the greater mechanism of society, operating within another machine, the earth, which itself operates within the greater mechanical design of the universe.

When I was in Berlin, I spoke to a rabbi who had, it seemed to me, lost his faith. When I asked him if he still believed in God, he simply shook his head and widened his eyes as if to say, *How is this possible?* He had been telling me about his congregation: older people, many of Polish origin, survivors of the holocaust who were not able to leave Germany after the war because they were too ill to travel. He was poised in this painful place

by choice. He had come to lead this congregation only temporarily but, once feeling the condition of his people, decided to stay. Still, despite his answer, and as much as the holocaust made a terrible argument for the death of the spirit, talking in that small study with this man, I could feel from him the light of something surviving.

The religious tradition that shaped Heinrich's childhood argues that the soul is not part of flesh but is instead a prisoner of the body. But suppose the soul is meant to live in and through the body and to know itself in the heart of earthly existence?

Then the soul is an integral part of the child's whole being, and its growth is thus part of the child's growth. It is, for example, like a seed planted underground in the soil, naturally moving toward the light. And it comes into its fullest manifestation thus only when seen, especially when self meeting self returns a gaze.

What then occurs if the soul in its small beginnings is forced to take on a secret life? A boy learns, for instance, to hide his thoughts from his father simply by failing to record them in his journals. He harbors his secrets in fear and guilt, confessing them to no one until in time the voice of his father chastising him becomes his own. A small war is waged in his mind. Daily implosions take place under his skin, by which in increments something in him seems to disappear. Gradually his father's voice subsumes the vitality of all his desires and even his rage, so that now what he wants most passionately is his own obedience, and his rage is aimed at his own failures. As over time his secrets fade from memory, he ceases to tell them, even to himself, so that finally a day arrives when he believes the image he has made of himself in his diaries is true.

The child, Dr. Schreber advised, *should be permeated by the impossibility of locking something in his heart*. The doctor who gave this advice had a son who was hospitalized for disabling schizophrenia. Another of his children committed suicide. But this was not taken as a warning against his approach. His methods of educating children were so much a part of the canon of everyday life in Germany that they were introduced into the state school system.

That this philosophy was taught in school gives me an interior view of the catastrophe to follow. It adds a certain dimension to my image of these events to know that a nation of citizens learned that no part of themselves could be safe from the scrutiny of authority, nothing locked in the heart, and at the same time to discover that the head of the secret police of this nation was the son of a schoolmaster. It was this man, after all, Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, who was later to say, speaking of the mass arrests of Jews, *Protective custody is an act of care*.

The polite manner of young Heinrich's diaries reminds me of life in my grandmother's home. Not the grandmother I lost and later found, but the one who, for many years, raised me. She was my mother's mother. The family would assemble in the living room together, sitting with a certain

reserve, afraid to soil the surfaces. What was it that by accident might have been made visible?

All our family photographs were posed. We stood together in groups of three or four and squinted into the sun. My grandmother directed us to smile. I have carried one of these photographs with me for years without acknowledging to myself that in it my mother has the look she always had when she drank too much. In another photograph, taken near the time of my parents' divorce, I can see that my father is almost crying, though I could not see this earlier. I must have felt obliged to see only what my grandmother wanted us to see. Tranquil, domestic scenes.

In the matrix of the mitochondria all the processes of transformation join together in a central vortex.

We were not comfortable with ourselves as a family. There was a great shared suffering and yet we never wept together, except for my mother, who would alternately weep and then rage when she was drunk. Together, under my grandmother's tutelage, we kept up appearances. Her effort was ceaseless.

When at the age of six I went to live with her, my grandmother worked to reshape me. I learned what she thought was correct grammar. The manners she had studied in books of etiquette were passed on to me, not by casual example but through anxious memorization and drill. Napkin to be lifted by the corner and swept onto the lap. Hand to be clasped firmly but not too firmly.

We were not to the manner born. On one side my great-grandfather was a farmer, and on the other a butcher newly emigrated from Ireland, who still spoke with a brogue. Both great-grandfathers drank too much, the one in public houses, the other more quietly at home. The great-grandfather who farmed was my grandmother's father. He was not wealthy but he aspired to gentility. My grandmother inherited both his aspiration and his failure.

We considered ourselves finer than the neighbors to our left with their chaotic household. But when certain visitors came, we were as if driven by an inward, secret panic that who we really were might be discovered. Inadvertently, by some careless gesture, we might reveal to these visitors who were our betters that we did not belong with them, that we were not real. Though of course we never spoke of this, to anyone, not even ourselves.

Gebhard Himmler's family was newly risen from poverty. Just as in my family, the Himmlers' gentility was a thinly laid surface, maintained no doubt only with great effort. Gebhard's father had come from a family of peasants and small artisans. Such a living etched from the soil, and by one's hands, is tenuous and hard. As is frequently the case with young men born to poverty, Johann became a soldier. And, like many young soldiers, he got himself into trouble more than once for brawling and general

mischievous. On one occasion he was reproved for what was called *immoral behavior with a low woman*. But nothing of this history survived in his son's version of him. By the time Gebhard was born, Johann was fifty-six years old and had reformed his ways. Having joined the royal police force of Bavaria, over the years he rose to the rank of sergeant. He was a respectable man, with a respectable position.

Perhaps Gebhard never learned of his father's less than respectable past. He was only three years old when Johann died. If he had the slightest notion, he did not breathe a word to his own children. Johann became the icon of the Himmler family, the heroic soldier who single-handedly brought his family from the obscurity of poverty into the warm light of the favored. Yet obscure histories have a way of casting a shadow over the present. Those who are born to propriety have a sense of entitlement, and this affords them some ease as they execute the correct mannerisms of their class. More recent members of the elect are less certain of themselves; around the edges of newly minted refinement one discerns a certain fearfulness, expressed perhaps as uncertainty, or as its opposite, rigidity.

One can sense that rigidity in Gebhard's face as a younger man. In a photograph of the Himmler family, Gebhard, who towers in the background,

**HE HAS THE FACE OF ONE
WHO LOOKS FOR MISTAKES.
HE IS VIGILANT.**

seems severe. He has the face of one who looks for mistakes. He is vigilant. Heinrich's mother looks very small next to him, almost as if she is cowering. She has that look I have seen many times on my father's face, which one can only describe as ameliorating.

Heinrich is very small. He stands closest to the camera, shimmering in a white dress. His face is pretty, even delicate.

I am looking now at the etching called *Poverty*, made in 1897. Near the center, calling my attention, a woman holds her head in her hands. She stares through her hands into the face of a sleeping infant. Though the infant and the sheet and pillow around are filled with light, one recognizes that the child is dying. In a darker corner, two worried figures huddle, a father and another child. Room, mother, father, child exist in lines, a multitude of lines, and each line is filled with a rare intelligence.

Just as the physicist's scrutiny changes the object of perception, so does art transmute experience. One cannot look upon what Käthe Kollwitz has drawn without feeling. The lines around the child are bleak with unreason. Never have I seen so clearly that what we call poverty is simply a raw exposure to the terror and fragility of life. But there is more in this image. There is meaning in the frame. One can feel the artist's eyes. Her gaze is in one place soft, in another intense. Like the light around the infant, her attention interrupts the shadow that falls across the room.

The artist's choice of subject and the way she saw it were both radical departures, not only from certain acceptable assumptions in the world of art, but also from established social ideas because the poor

were thought of as less than human. The death of a child to a poor parent was supposed to be a less painful event. In her depiction, the artist told a different story.

Heinrich is entering a new school now, and so his father makes a list of all his future classmates. Beside the name of each child he writes the child's father's name, what this father does for a living, and his social position. Heinrich must be careful, Gebhard tells him, to choose whom he befriends. In his diaries the boy seldom mentions his friends by name. Instead he writes that he played, for instance, with the landlord's child.

There is so much for Heinrich to learn. Gebhard must teach him the right way to bow. The proper forms of greeting. The history of his family; the history of his nation. Its heroes. His grandfather's illustrious military past. There is an order in the world and Heinrich has a place in this order which he must be trained to fill. His life is strictly scheduled. At this hour a walk in the woods so that he can appreciate nature. After that a game of chess to develop his mind. And after that piano, so that he will be cultured.

If a part of himself has vanished, that part of the self that feels and wants, and from which hence a coherent life might be shaped, Heinrich is not at sea yet. He has no time to drift or feel lost. Each moment has been spoken for, every move prescribed. He has only to carry out his father's plans for him.

But everything in his life is not as it should be. He is not popular among his classmates. Should it surprise us to learn that he has a penchant for listening to the secrets of his companions, and that afterward he repeats these secrets to his father, the schoolmaster? There is perhaps a secret he would like to learn and one he would like to tell, but this has long since been forgotten. Whatever he learns now he must tell his father. He must not keep anything from him. He must keep his father's good will at all costs. For, without his father, he does not exist.

And there is another reason Heinrich is not accepted by his classmates. He is frail. As an infant, stricken by influenza, he came close to perishing and his body still retains the mark of that illness. He is not strong. He is not good at the games the other boys play. At school he tries over and over to raise himself on the crossbars, unsuccessfully. He covets the popularity of his stronger, more masculine brother, Gebhard. But he cannot keep up with his brother. One day, when they go out for a simple bicycle ride together, Heinrich falls into the mud and returns with his clothes torn.

It is 1914. A war begins. There are parades. Young men marching in uniform. Tearful ceremonies at the railway station. Songs. Decorations. Heinrich is enthusiastic. The war has given him a sense of purpose in life. Like other boys, he plays at soldiering. He follows the war closely, writing in his diary of the progress of armies, *This time with 40 Army Corps and Russia and France against Germany*. The entries he makes do not seem so

listless now; they have a new vigor. As the war continues, a new ambition gradually takes the shape of determination. Is this the way he will finally prove himself? Heinrich wants to be a soldier. And above all he wants a uniform.

It is 1915. In her journal Käthe Kollwitz records a disturbing sight. The night before at the opera she found herself sitting next to a young soldier. He was blinded. He sat *without stirring, his hands on his knees, his head erect*. She could not stop looking at him, and the memory of him, she writes now, *cuts her to the quick*.

It is 1916. As Heinrich comes of age he implores his father to help him find a regiment. He has many heated opinions about the war. But his thoughts are like the thoughts and feelings of many adolescents; what he expresses has no steady line of reason. His opinions are filled with contradictions, and he lacks that awareness of self which can turn ambivalence into an inner dialogue. Yet, beneath this amorphous bravado, there is a pattern. As if he were trying on different attitudes, Heinrich swings from harshness to compassion. In one place he writes, *The Russian prisoners multiply like vermin*. (Should I write here that this is a word he will one day use for Jews?) But later he is sympathetic to the same prisoners because they are so far away from home. Writing once of *the silly old women and petty bourgeois . . . who so dislike war*, in another entry, he remembers the young men he has seen depart on trains and he asks, *How many are alive today?*

Is the direction of any life inevitable? Or are there crossroads, points at which the direction might be changed? I am looking again at the Himmler family. Heinrich's infant face resembles the face of his mother. His face is soft. And his mother? In the photograph she is a fading presence. She occupied the same position as did most women in German families, secondary and obedient to the undisputed power of her husband. She has a slight smile which for some reason reminds me of the smile of a child I saw in a photograph from an album made by the SS. This child's image was captured as she stood on the platform at Auschwitz. In the photograph she emanates a certain frailty. Her smile is a very feminine smile. Asking, or perhaps pleading, *Don't hurt me*.

Is it possible that Heinrich, looking into that child's face, might have seen himself there? What is it in a life that makes one able to see oneself in others? Such affinities do not stop with obvious resemblance. There is a sense in which we all enter the lives of others.

It is 1917, and a boy who will be named Heinz is born to Catholic parents living in Vienna. Heinz's father bears a certain resemblance to Heinrich's father. He is a civil servant and, also like Gebhard, he is pedantic and correct in all he does. Heinrich will never meet this boy. And yet their paths will cross.

Early in the same year as Heinz's birth, Heinrich's father has finally succeeded in getting him into a regiment. As the war continues for one more year, Heinrich comes close to achieving his dream. He will be a soldier. He is sent to officer's training. Yet he is not entirely happy. *The food is bad, he writes to his mother, and there is not enough of it. It is cold. There are bedbugs. The room is barren.* Can she send him food? A blanket? Why doesn't she write him more often? Has she forgotten him? They are calling up troops. Suppose he should be called to the front and die?

But something turns in him. Does he sit on the edge of a neat, narrow military bunk bed as he writes in his diary that he does not want to be like a boy who whines to his mother? Now, he writes a different letter: *I am once more a soldier body and soul.* He loves his uniform; the oath he has learned to write; the first inspection he passes. He signs his letters now, *Miles Heinrich.* Soldier Heinrich.

I am looking at another photograph. It is of two boys. They are both in military uniform. Gebhard, Heinrich's older brother, is thicker and taller. Next to him Heinrich is still diminutive. But his face has become harder, and his smile, though faint like his mother's smile, has gained a new quality, harsh and stiff like the little collar he wears.

Most men can remember a time in their lives when they were not so different from girls, and they also remember when that time ended. In ancient Greece a young boy lived with his mother, practicing a feminine life in her household, until the day he was taken from her into the camp of men. From this day forward the life that had been soft and graceful became rigorous and hard, as the older boy was prepared for the life of a soldier.

My grandfather on my mother's side was a contemporary of Heinrich Himmler. He was the youngest boy in the family and an especially pretty child. Like Heinrich and all small boys in this period, he was dressed in a lace gown. His hair was long and curled about his face. Like Heinrich, he was his mother's favorite. She wanted to keep him in his finery. He was so beautiful in it, and he was her last child. My great-grandmother Sarah had a dreamy, artistic nature, and in his early years my grandfather took after her. But all of this made him seem girlish. And his father and older brothers teased him mercilessly. Life improved for him only when he graduated to long pants. With them he lost his dreamy nature too.

The soul is often imagined to be feminine. All those qualities thought of as soulful, a dreaminess or artistic sensibility, are supposed to come more naturally to women. Ephemeral, half seen, half present, nearly ghostly, with only the vaguest relation to the practical world of physical law, the soul appears to us as lost. The hero, with his more masculine virtues, must go in search of her. But there is another, older story of the soul. In this story she is firmly planted on the earth. She is incarnate and

visible everywhere. Neither is she faint of heart, nor fading in her resolve. It is she, in fact, who goes bravely in search of desire.

1918. Suddenly the war is over. Germany has lost. Heinrich has failed to win his commission. He has not fought in a single battle. Prince Heinrich, his namesake, has died. The prince will be decorated for heroism, after his death. Heinrich returns home, not an officer or even a soldier any longer. He returns to school, completing his studies at the gymnasium and then the university. But he is adrift. Purposeless. And like the world he belongs to, dissatisfied. Neither man nor boy, he does not know what he wants.

Until now he could rely on a strict regimen provided by his father. Nothing was left uncertain or undefined for long in his father's house. The thoroughness of Gebhard's hold over his family comes alive for me through this procedure: every package, letter, or money order to pass through the door was by Gebhard's command to be duly recorded. And I begin to grasp a sense of Gebhard's priorities when I read that Heinrich, on one of his leaves home during the war, assisted his mother in this task. The shadow of his father's habits will stretch out over history. They will fall over an office in Berlin through which the SS, and the entire network of concentration camps, are administered. Every single piece of paper issued with regard to this office will pass over Heinrich's desk, and to each page he will add his own initials. Schedules for trains. Orders for building supplies. Adjustments in salaries. No detail will escape his surmise or fail to be recorded.

But at this moment in his life Heinrich is facing a void. I remember a similar void, when a long and intimate relationship ended. What I felt then was fear. And at times panic. In a journal I kept after this separation, I wrote, *Direct knowledge of the illusory nature of panic. The feeling that I had let everything go out of control.* I could turn in only one direction: inward. Each day I abated my fears for a time by observing myself. But what exists in that direction for Heinrich? He has not been allowed to inhabit that terrain. His inner life has been sealed off both from his father and himself.

I am not certain what I am working for, he writes, and then, not able to let this uncertainty remain, he adds, *I work because it is my duty.* He spends long hours in his room, seldom leaving the house at all. He is at sea. Still somewhat the adolescent, unformed, not knowing what face he should put on when going out into the world, in his journal he confesses that he still lacks that *naturally superior kind of manner that he would dearly like to possess.*

Is it any wonder then that he is so eager to rejoin the army? The army gave purpose and order to his life. He wants his uniform again. In his uniform he knows who he is. But his frailty haunts him. Over and over he shows up at recruiting stations throughout Bavaria only to be turned away each time, with the single word, *Untauglich*. Unfit. At night the echo of this word keeps him awake.

When he tries to recover his pride, he suffers another failure of a similar kind. A student of agriculture at the university, now he dreams of becoming a farmer. He believes he can take strength and vitality from the soil. After all his own applications are rejected, his father finds him a position in the countryside. He rides toward his new life on his motorcycle and is pelted by torrents of rain. Though he is cold and hungry, he is also exuberant. He has defeated his own weakness. But after only a few weeks his body fails him again. He returns home ill with typhus and must face the void once more.

What Germany needs now is a man of iron. How easy it is to hear the irony of these words Heinrich records in his journal. But at this moment in history, he is hearing another kind of echo. There are so many others who agree with him. The treaty of Versailles is taken as a humiliation. An unforgivable weakness, it is argued, has been allowed to invade the nation.

1920. 1922. 1923. Heinrich is twenty, twenty-two, twenty-three. He is growing up with the century. And he starts to adopt certain opinions popular at this time. As I imagine myself in his frame of mind, facing a void, cast into unknown waters, these opinions appear like rescue ships on the horizon, a promise of *terra firma*, the known.

It is for instance fashionable to argue that the emergence of female equality has drained the nation of its strength. At social gatherings Heinrich likes to discuss the differences between men and women. That twilight area between the certainties of gender, homosexuality, horrifies him. A man should be a man and a woman a woman. Sexually explicit illustrations in a book by Oscar Wilde horrify him. Uncomfortable with the opposite sex, so much so that one of his female friends believes he hates women, he has strong feelings about how men and women ought to relate. *A real man*, he sets down in his diary, *should love a woman as a child who must be admonished perhaps even punished, when she is foolish, though she must also be protected and looked after because she is so weak.*

As I try to enter Heinrich's experience, the feeling I sense behind these words is of immense comfort. I know who I am. My role in life, what I am to feel, what I am to be, has been made clear. I am a man. I am the strong protector. And what's more, I am needed. There is one who is weak. One who is weaker than I am. And I am the one who must protect her.

And yet behind the apparent calm of my present mood, there is an uneasiness. Who is this one that I protect? Does she tell me the truth about herself? I am beginning to suspect that she hides herself from me. There is something secretive in her nature. She is an unknown, even dangerous, territory.

The year is 1924. And Heinrich is still fascinated with secrets. He discovers that his brother's fiancée has committed one or maybe even two indiscretions. At his urging, Gebhard breaks off the engagement. But

Heinrich is still not satisfied. He writes a friend who lives near his brother's former fiancée, *Do you know of any other shameful stories?* After this, he hires a private detective to look into her past.

Is it any coincidence that in the same year he writes in his diary that he has met a *great man, genuine and pure*? This man, he notes, may be the new leader Germany is seeking. He finds he shares a certain drift of thought with this man. He is discovering who he is now, partly by affinity and partly by negation. In his picture of himself, a profile begins to emerge cast in light and shadow. He knows now who he is and who he is not. He is not Jewish.

And increasingly he becomes obsessed with who he is not. In this pursuit, his curiosity is fed by best-selling books, posters, films, journals; he is part of a larger social movement, and this no doubt gives him comfort, and one cannot, in studying the landscape of his mind as set against the landscape of the social body, discover where he ends and the milieu of this time begins. He is perhaps like a particle in a wave, a wave which has only the most elusive relationship with the physical world, existing as an afterimage in the mind.

I can imagine him sitting at a small desk in his bedroom, still in his father's home. Is it the same desk where he was required to record some desultory sentences in his diary every day? He is bent over a book. It is evening. The light is on, shining on the pages of the book. Which book among the books he has listed in his journal does he read now? Is it *Das Liebesnest* (*The Lovenest*), telling the story of a liaison between a Jewish man and a gentile woman? *Rasse*? Explaining the concept of racial superiority? Or is it *Juden Schuldbuch* (*The Book of Jewish Guilt*). Or *Die Sünde wider das Blut* (*The Sin Against the Blood*).

One can follow somewhat his train of thought here and there where he makes comments on what he reads in his journal. When he reads *Tscheka*, for instance, a history of the secret police in Russia, he says he is disappointed. *Everyone knows*, he writes, that the Jews control the secret police in Russia. But nowhere in the pages of this book does he find a mention of this "fact."

His mind has begun to take a definite shape, even a predictable pattern. Everywhere he casts his eyes he will discover a certain word. Wherever his thoughts wander he brings them back to this word. *Jew. Jude. Jew.* With this word he is on firm ground again. In the sound of the word, a box is closed, a box with all the necessary documents, with all the papers in order.

My grandfather was an anti-Semite. He had a long list of enemies that he liked to recite. Blacks were among them. And Catholics. And the English. He was Protestant and Irish. Because of his drinking he retired early (though we never discussed the cause). In my childhood I often found him sitting alone in the living room that was darkened by closed venetian blinds which kept all our colors from fading. Lonely myself, I would try to speak with him. His repertoire was small. When I was younger he would tell me stories of his childhood, and I loved those stories. He talked about

the dog named Blackie that was his then. A ceramic statue of a small black dog resembling him stood near the fireplace. He loved this dog in a way that was almost painful to hear. But he could never enter that intricate world of expressed emotion in which the shadings of one's life as it is felt and experienced become articulated. This way of speaking was left to the women of our family. As I grew older and he could no longer tell me the story of his dog, he would talk to me about politics. It was then that, with a passion he revealed nowhere else, he would recite to me his long list filled with everyone he hated.

I did not like to listen to my grandfather speak this way. His face would get red, and his voice took on a grating tone that seemed to abrade not only the ears but some other slower, calmer velocity within the body of the room. His eyes, no longer looking at me, blazed with a kind of blindness. There was no reaching him at these moments. He was beyond any kind of touch or remembering. Even so, reciting the long list of those he hated, he came temporarily alive. Then, once out of this frame of mind, he lapsed into a kind of fog which we called, in the family, his retirement.

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There was another part of my grandfather's mind that also disturbed me. But this passion was veiled. I stood at the borders of it occasionally catching glimpses. He had a stack of magazines by the chair he always occupied. They were devoted to the subject of crime, and the crimes were always grisly, involving photographs of women or girls uncovered in ditches, hacked to pieces or otherwise mutilated. I was never supposed to look in these magazines, but I did. What I saw there could not be reconciled with the other experience I had of my grandfather, fond of me, gentle, almost anachronistically protective.

Heinrich Himmler was also fascinated with crime. Along with books about Jews, he read avidly on the subjects of police work, espionage, torture. Despite his high ideals regarding chastity, he was drawn to torrid, even pornographic fiction, including *Ein Sadist im Priesterrock* (*A Sadist in Priestly Attire*) which he read quickly, noting in his journal that it was a book *about the corruption of women and girls . . . in Paris*.

Entering the odd and often inconsistent maze of his opinions, I feel a certain queasiness. I cannot find a balance point. I search in vain for some center, that place which is in us all, and is perhaps even beyond nationality, or even gender, the felt core of existence, which seems to be at the same time the most real. In Heinrich's morass of thought there are no connecting threads, no integrated whole. I find only the opinions themselves, standing in an odd relation to gravity, as if hastily formed, a rickety, perilous structure.

I am looking at a photograph. It was taken in 1925. Or perhaps 1926. A group of men pose before a doorway in Landshut. Over this doorway

is a wreathed swastika. Nearly all the men are in uniform. Some wear shiny black boots. Heinrich is among them. He is the slightest, very thin. Heinrich Himmler. He is near the front. At the far left there is the blurred figure of a man who has been caught in motion as he rushes to join the other men. Of course I know his feeling. The desire to partake, and even to be part of memory.

Photographs are strange creations. They are depictions of a moment that is always passing; after the shutter closes, the subject moves out of the frame and begins to change outwardly or inwardly. One ages. One shifts to a different state of consciousness. Subtle changes can take place in an instant, perhaps one does not even feel them — but they are perceptible to the camera.

The idea we have of reality as a fixed quantity is an illusion. Everything moves. And the process of knowing oneself is in constant motion too, because the self is always changing. Nowhere is this so evident as in the process of art which takes one at once into the self and into *terra incognita*, the land of the unknown. *I am groping in the dark*, the artist Käthe Kollwitz writes in her journal. Here, I imagine she is not so much uttering a cry of despair as making a simple statement. A sense of emptiness always precedes creation.

Now, as I imagine Himmler, dressed in his neat uniform, seated behind his desk at party headquarters, I can feel the void he feared begin to recede. In every way his life has taken on definition. He has a purpose and a schedule. Even the place left by the cessation of his father's lessons has now been filled. He is surrounded by men whose ideas he begins to adopt. From Alfred Rosenberg he learns about the history of Aryan blood, a line Rosenberg traces back to thousands of years before Christ. From Walther Darré he learns that the countryside is a source of Nordic strength. (And that Jews gravitate toward cities.)

Yet I do not find the calmness of a man who has found himself in the descriptions I have encountered of Heinrich Himmler. Rather, he is filled with an anxious ambivalence. If there was once someone in him who felt strongly one way or the other, this one has long ago vanished. In a room filled with other leaders, he seems to fade into the woodwork, his manner obsequious, his effect inconsequential. He cannot make a decision alone. He is known to seek the advice of other men for even the smallest decisions. In the years to come it will be whispered that he is being led by his own assistant, Reinhard Heydrich. He has made only one decision on his own with a consistent resolve. Following Hitler with unwavering loyalty, he is known as *der treue Heinrich*, true Heinrich. He describes himself as an instrument of the Führer's will.

But still he has something of his own. Something hidden. And this will make him powerful. He is a gatherer of secrets. As he supervises the sale of advertising space for the Nazi newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, he instructs the members of his staff to gather information, not only on the party enemies, the socialists and the communists, but on Nazi Party members themselves. In his small office he sits surrounded by

voluminous files that are filled with secrets. From this he will build his secret police. By 1925, with an order from Adolf Hitler, the Schutzstaffel, or SS, has become an official institution.

His life is moving now. Yet in this motion one has the feeling not of a flow, as in the flow of water in a cell, nor as the flow of rivers toward an ocean, but of an engine, a locomotive moving at high speed, or even a missile, traveling above the ground. History has an uncanny way of creating its own metaphors. In 1930, months after Himmler is elected to the Reichstag, Wernher von Braun begins his experiments with liquid fuel missiles that will one day soon lead to the development of the V-2 rocket.

The successful journey of a missile depends upon the study of ballistics. Gravitational fields vary at different heights. The relationship of a projectile to the earth's surface will determine its trajectory. The missile may give the illusion of liberation from the earth, or even abandon. Young men dreaming of space often invest the missile with these qualities. Yet, paradoxically, one is more free of the consideration of gravity while traveling the surface of the earth on foot. There is no necessity for mathematical calculation for each step, nor does one need to apply Newton's laws to take a walk. But the missile has in a sense been forced away from its own presence; the wisdom that is part of its own weight has been transgressed. It finds itself thus careening in a space devoid of memory, always on the verge of falling, but not falling and hence like one who is constantly afraid of illusion, gripped by an anxiety that cannot be resolved even by a fate that threatens catastrophe.

The catastrophes which came to pass after Heinrich Himmler's astonishing ascent to power did not occur in his own life, but came to rest in the lives of others, distant from him, and out of the context of his daily world. It is 1931. Heinz, the boy born in Vienna to Catholic parents, has just turned sixteen, and he is beginning to learn something about himself. All around him his school friends are falling in love with girls. But when he searches inside himself, he finds no such feelings. He is pulled in a different direction. He finds that he is still drawn to another boy. He does not yet know, or even guess, that these feelings will one day place him in the territory of a target.

It is 1933. Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, has become President of the Bavarian police. In this capacity he begins a campaign against *subversive elements*. Opposition journalists, Jewish business owners, Social Democrats, Communists — names culled from a list compiled on index cards by Himmler's deputy, Reinhard Heydrich — are rounded up and arrested. When the prisons become too crowded, Himmler builds temporary camps. Then, on March 22, the Reichsführer opens the first official and permanent concentration camp at Dachau.

It is 1934. Himmler's power and prestige in the Reich are growing. Yet someone stands in his way. Within the hierarchy of the state

police forces, Ernst Röhm, Commandant of the SA, stands over him. But Himmler has made an alliance with Hermann Göring, who as President Minister of Prussia controls the Prussian police, known as the Gestapo. Through a telephone-tapping technique Göring has uncovered evidence of a seditious plot planned by Röhm against the Führer, and he brings this evidence to Himmler. The Führer, having his own reasons to proceed against Röhm, a notorious homosexual and a socialist, empowers the SS and the Gestapo to form an execution committee. This committee will assassinate Röhm, along with the other leaders of the SA. And in the same year, Göring transfers control of the Gestapo to the SS.

But something else less easy to conquer stands in the way of his dreams for himself. It is his own body. I can see him now as he struggles. He is on a playing field in Berlin. And he has broken out in a sweat. He has been trying once again to earn the Reich's sports badge, an honor whose requirements he himself established but cannot seem to fulfill. For three years he has exercised and practiced. On one day he will lift the required weights or run the required laps, but at every trial he fails to throw the discus far enough. His attempt is always a few centimeters short.

And once he is Reichsführer, he will set certain other standards for superiority that, no matter how heroic his efforts, he will never be able to meet. A sign of the *Übermensch*, he says, is blondness, but he himself is dark. He says he is careful to weed out any applicant for the SS who shows traces of a mongolian ancestry, but he himself has the narrow eyes he takes as a sign of such a descent. *I have refused to accept any man whose size was below six feet because I know only men of a certain size have the necessary quality of blood*, he declares, standing just five foot seven behind the podium.

It is the same year, and Heinz, who is certain now that he is a homosexual, has decided to end the silence which he feels to be a burden to him. From the earliest years of his childhood he has trusted his mother with all of his secrets. Now he will tell her another secret, the secret of whom he loves. *My dear child*, she tells him, *it is your life and you must live it*.

It is 1936. Though he does not know it, Himmler is moving into the sphere of Heinz's life now. He has organized a special section of the Gestapo to deal with homosexuality and abortion. On October 11, he declares in a public speech, *Germany's forebears knew what to do with homosexuals. They drowned them in bogs*. This was not punishment, he argues, but *the extermination of unnatural existence*.

As I read these words from Himmler's speech, they call to mind an image from a more recent past, an event I nearly witnessed. On my return from Berlin and after my search for my grandmother, I spent a few days in Maine, close to the city of Bangor. This is a quiet town, not much used to violence. But just days before I arrived a young man had been murdered

there. He was a homosexual. He wore an earring in one ear. While he walked home one evening with another man, three boys stopped him on the street. They threw him to the ground and began to kick him. He had trouble catching his breath. He was asthmatic. They picked him up and carried him to a railing of a nearby bridge. He told them he could not swim. Yet still, they threw him over the railing of the bridge into the stream, and he drowned. I saw a picture of him printed in the newspaper. That kind of beauty only very graceful children possess shined through his adult features. It was said that he had come to New England to live with his lover. But the love had failed, and before he died he was piecing his life back together.

When Himmler heard that one of his heroes, Frederick the Great, was a homosexual, he refused to believe his ears. I remember the year when my sister announced to my family that she was a lesbian. I can still recall the chill of fear that went up my spine at the sound of the word "queer." We came of age in the fifties; this was a decade of conformity, awash with mood both public and private, bearing on the life of the body and the body politic. Day after day my grandfather would sit in front of the television set watching as Joseph McCarthy interrogated witnesses about their loyalty to the flag. At the same time, a strict definition of what a woman or a man is had returned to capture the shared imagination. In school I was taught sewing and cooking, and I learned to carry my books in front of my chest to strengthen the muscles which held up my breasts.

I was not happy to hear that my sister was a homosexual. Moved from one member of my family to another, I did not feel secure in the love of others. As the child of divorce I was already different. *Where are your mother and father? Why don't you live with them?* I dreaded these questions. Now my sister, whom I adored and in many ways had patterned myself after, had become an outcast, moved even further out of the circle than I.

It is March 1938. Germany has invaded Austria. Himmler has put on a field-gray uniform for the occasion. Two hand grenades dangle from his Sam Browne belt. Accompanied by a special command unit of twenty-eight men armed with tommy guns and light machine guns, he proceeds to Vienna. Here he will set up Gestapo headquarters in the Hotel Metropole before he returns to Berlin.

It is a Friday, in March of 1939. Heinz, who is twenty-two years old now, and a university student, has received a summons. He is to appear for questioning at the Hotel Metropole. Telling his mother it can't be anything serious, he leaves. He enters a room and stands before a desk. The man behind the desk does not raise his head to nod. He continues to write. When he puts his pen down and looks up at the young man, he tells him, *You are a queer, homosexual, admit it.* Heinz tries to deny this. But the man behind the desk pulls out a photograph. He sees two faces here he knows. His own face and the face of his lover. He begins to weep.

I have come to believe that every life bears in some way on every other. The motion of cause and effect is like the motion of a wave in water, continuous, within and not without the matrix of being, so that all consequences, whether we know them or not, are intimately embedded in our experience. But the missile, as it hurls toward its target, has lost its context. It has been driven farther than the eye can see. How can one speak of direction any longer? Nothing in the space the missile passes through can seem familiar. In the process of flight, alienated by terror, this motion has become estranged from life, has fallen out of the natural rhythm of events.

I am imagining Himmler as he sits behind his desk in January of 1940. The procedures of introduction into the concentration camps have all been outlined or authorized by Himmler himself. He supervises every detail of these operations. Following his father's penchant for order, he makes many very explicit rules, and requires that reports be filed continually. Train schedules, orders for food supplies, descriptions of punishments all pass over his desk. He sits behind a massive door of carved wood, in his office, paneled in light, unvarnished oak, behind a desk that is normally empty, and clean, except for the bust of Hitler he displays at one end, and a little drummer boy at the other, between which he reads, considers and initials countless pieces of paper.

One should teach a child a sense of shame. These words of Himmler's journals come back to me as I imagine Heinz now standing naked in the snow. The weather is below zero. After a while he is taken to a cold shower, and then issued an ill-fitting uniform. Now he is ordered to stand with the other prisoners once more out in the cold while the commandant reads the rules. All the prisoners in these barracks are homosexuals. There are pink triangles sewn to their uniforms. They must sleep with the light on, they are told, and with their hands outside their blankets. This is a rule made especially for homosexual men. Any man caught with his hands under his blankets will be taken outside into the icy night where several bowls of water will be poured over him, and where he will be made to stand for an hour.

Except for the fact that this punishment usually led to death from cold and exposure, this practice reminds me of Dr. Schreber's procedure for curing children of masturbation. Just a few nights ago I woke up with this thought: *Was Dr. Schreber afraid of children?* Or the child he once was? Fear is often just beneath the tyrant's fury, a fear that must grow with the trajectory of his flight from himself. At Dachau I went inside a barrack. It was a standard design, similar in many camps. The plan of the camps too was standard, and resembled, so I was told by a German friend, the camp sites designed for the Hitler Youth. This seemed to me significant, not as a clue in an analysis, but more like a gesture that colors and changes a speaker's words.

It is 1941. And Heinrich Himmler pays a visit to the Russian front. He has been put in charge of organizing the *Einsatzgruppen*, moving groups of men who carry out the killing of civilians and partisans. He watches as a deep pit is dug by the captured men and women. Then, suddenly, a young man catches his eye. He is struck by some quality the man possesses. He takes a liking to him. He has the commandant of the *Einsatzgruppen* bring the young man to him. *Who was your father?* he asks. *Your mother? Your grandparents? Do you have at least one grandparent who was not Jewish?* He is trying to save the young man. But he answers no to all the questions. So Himmler, strictly following the letter of the law, watches as the young man is put to death.

The captured men, women, and children are ordered to remove their clothing then. Naked, they stand before the pit they have dug. Some scream. Some attempt escape. The young men in uniform place their rifles against their shoulders and fire into the naked bodies. They do not fall silently. There are cries. There are open wounds. There are faces blown apart. Stomachs opened up. The dying groan. Weep. Flutter. Open their mouths.

There is no photograph of the particular moment when Heinrich Himmler stares into the face of death. What does he look like? Is he pale? He is stricken, the accounts tell us, and more than he thought he would be. He has imagined something quieter, more efficient, like the even rows of numbers, the alphabetical lists of names he likes to put in his files. Something he might be able to understand and contain. But one cannot contain death so easily.



Death with Girl in Her Lap. One of many studies the artist did of death. A girl is drawn, her body dead or almost dead, in that suspended state where the breath is almost gone. There is no movement. No will. The lines the artist has drawn are simple. She has not rendered the natural form of head, arm, buttock, thigh exactly. But all these lines hold the feeling of a body in them. And as my eyes rest on this image, I can feel my own fear of death, and also, the largeness of grief, how grief will not let you remain insulated from your own feelings, or from life itself. It is as if I knew this girl. And death, too, appears to know her, cradling the fragile body with tenderness; she seems to understand the sorrow of dying. Perhaps this figure has taken into herself all the deaths she has witnessed. And in this way, she has become merciful.

Because Himmler finds it so difficult to witness these deaths, the commandant makes an appeal to him. If it is hard for you, he says, think what it must be for these young men who must carry out these executions, day after day. Shaken by what he has seen and heard, Himmler returns to Berlin resolved to ease the pain of these men. He will consult an engineer and set him to work immediately on new designs. Before the year has

ended, he presents the *Einsatzgruppen* with a mobile killing truck. Now the young men will not have to witness death day after day. A hose from the exhaust pipe funnels fumes into a chamber built on the bed of a covered truck, which has a red cross painted on its side so its passengers will not be alarmed as they enter it.

To a certain kind of mind, what is hidden away ceases to exist.

Himmler does not like to watch the suffering of his prisoners. In this sense he does not witness the consequences of his own commands. But the mind is like a landscape in which nothing really ever disappears. What seems to have vanished has only transmuted to another form. Not wishing to witness what he has set in motion, still, in a silent part of himself, he must imagine what takes place. So, just as the child is made to live out the unclaimed imagination of the parent, others under Himmler's power were made to bear witness for him. Homosexuals were forced to witness and sometimes take part in the punishment of other homosexuals, Poles of other Poles, Jews of Jews. And as far as possible, the hands of the men of the SS were protected from the touch of death. Other prisoners were required to bury the bodies, or burn them in the ovens.

Hélène was turned in by a Jewish man who was trying, no doubt, to save his own life, and she was put under arrest by another Jewish man, an inmate of the same camp to which she was taken. She was grateful that she herself had not been forced to do harm. But something haunted her. A death that came to stand in place of her own death. As we walked through the streets of Paris she told me this story.

By the time of her arrest she was married and had a young son. Her husband was taken from their apartment during one of the mass arrests that began in July of 1942. Hélène was out at the time with her son. For some time she wandered the streets of Paris. She would sleep at night at the homes of various friends and acquaintances, leaving in the early morning so that she would not arouse suspicion among the neighbors. This was the hardest time, she told me, because there was so little food, even less than she was to have at Drancy. She had no ration card or any way of earning money. Her whole existence was illegal. She had to be as if invisible. She collected scraps from the street. It was on the street that she told me this story, as we walked from the fourth arrondissement to the fifth, crossing the bridge near Notre Dame, making our way toward the Boulevard St. Michel.

Her husband was a citizen of a neutral country and for this reason legally destined for another camp. From this camp he would not be deported. Instead he was taken to the French concentration camp at Drancy. After his arrest, hoping to help him, Hélène managed to take his papers to the Swiss Consulate. But the papers remained there. After her own arrest she was taken with her son to Drancy, where she was reunited with her husband. He told her that her efforts were useless. But still again

and again she found ways to smuggle out letters to friends asking them to take her husband's papers from the Swiss Consulate to the camp at Drancy. One of these letters was to save their lives.

After a few months, preparations began to send H       and her family to Auschwitz. Along with many other women, she was taken to have her hair cut short, though those consigned to that task decided she should keep her long, blond hair. Still, she was herded along with the others to the train station and packed into the cars. Then, just two hours before the train was scheduled to leave, H      , her son, and her husband were pulled from the train. Her husband's papers had been brought by the Swiss consul to the camp.

The Commandant, by assuming H       shared the same nationality with her husband, had made a fortuitous mistake.

But the train had to have a specific number of passengers before it could leave. In H      's place the guards brought a young man. She would never forget his face, she told me, or his name. Later she tried to find out whether he had lived or died but could learn nothing.

IN H      'S PLACE THE GUARDS BROUGHT A YOUNG MAN. SHE WOULD NEVER FORGET HIS FACE, SHE TOLD ME, OR HIS NAME. LATER SHE TRIED TO FIND OUT WHETHER HE HAD LIVED OR DIED BUT COULD LEARN NOTHING.

Himmler did not partake in the actual preparations for what he called "the final solution." Nor did he attend the Wannsee Conference where the decision to annihilate millions of human beings was made. He sent his assistant Heydrich. Yet Heydrich, who was there, did not count himself entirely present. He could say that each decision he made was at the bequest of Heinrich Himmler. In this way an odd system of insulation was created. These crimes, these murders of millions, were all carried out in absentia, as if by no one in particular.

This ghostlike quality, the strange absence of a knowing conscience, as if the living creature had abandoned the shell, was spread throughout the entire chain of command. So a French bureaucrat writing a letter in 1942 speaks in detail of the mass arrests that he himself supervised as if he had no other part in these murders except as a kind of spiritless cog in a vast machine whose force compelled him from without. *The German authorities have set aside especially for that purpose enough trains to transport 30,000 Jews, he writes. It is therefore necessary that the arrests made should correspond to the capacity of the trains.*

It is August 23, 1943. The first inmates of concentration camp Dora have arrived. Is there some reason why an unusually high percentage of prisoners ordered to work in this camp are homosexuals? They are set to work immediately, working with few tools, often with bare hands, to convert long tunnels carved into the Harz Mountains into a factory for the manufacture of missiles. They work for eighteen hours each day. Six of these hours are set aside for formal procedures, roll calls, official rituals

of the camp. For six hours they must try to sleep in the tunnels, on the damp earth, in the same area where the machines, pickaxes, explosions, and drills are making a continually deafening noise, twenty-four hours of every day. They are fed very little. They see the daylight only once a week, at the Sunday roll call. The tunnels themselves are illuminated with faint light bulbs. The production of missiles has been moved here because the factories at Peenemünde were bombed. Because the secret work at Peenemünde had been revealed to the Allies by an informer, after the bombing the Reichsführer SS proposed that the factories should be installed in a concentration camp. Here, he argued, security could be more easily enforced; only the guards had any freedom, and they were subject to the harsh discipline of the SS. The labor itself could be hidden under the soil of the Harz Mountains.

Memory can be like a long, half-lit tunnel, a tunnel where one is likely to encounter phantoms of a self, long concealed, no longer nourished with the force of consciousness, existing in a tortured state between life and death. In his account of his years at Peenemünde, Wernher von Braun never mentions concentration camp Dora. Yet he was seen there more than once by inmates who remembered him. As the designing engineer, he had to supervise many details of production. Conditions at camp Dora could not have escaped his attention. Dora did not have its own crematorium. And so many men and women died in the course of a day that the bodies waiting to be picked up by trucks and taken to the ovens of Buchenwald were piled high next to the entrance to the tunnels.

Perhaps von Braun told himself that what went on in those tunnels had nothing to do with him. He had not wished for these events, had not wanted them. The orders came from someone who had power over him. In the course of this writing I remembered a childhood incident that made me disown myself in the same way. My best friend, who was my neighbor, had a mean streak and because of this had a kind of power over the rest of us who played with her. For a year I left my grandmother's house to live with my mother again. On my return I had been replaced by another little girl, and the two of them excluded me. But finally my chance arrived. My friend had a quarrel with her new friend and enlisted me in an act of revenge. Together we cornered her at the back of a yard, pushing her into the garbage cans, yelling nasty words at her, throwing things at her.

My friend led the attack, inventing the strategies and the words which were hurled. With part of myself I knew what it was to be the object of this kind of assault. But I also knew this was the way to regain my place with my friend. Later I disowned my acts, as if I had not committed them. Because I was under the sway of my friend's power, I told myself that what I did was really her doing. And in this way became unreal to myself. It was as if my voice threatening her, my own anger, and my voice calling names, had never existed.

I was told this story by a woman who survived the holocaust. The war had not yet begun. Nor the exiles. Nor the mass arrests. But history was on the point of these events, tipping over, ready to fall into the relentless path of consequences. She was then just a child, playing games in the street. And one day she found herself part of a circle of other children. They had surrounded a little boy and were calling him names because he was Jewish. He was her friend. But she thought if she left this circle, or came to his defense, she herself would lose her standing among the others. Then, suddenly, in an angry voice her mother called her in from the street. As soon as the door shut behind her, her mother began to shout, words incomprehensible to her, and slapped her across the face. *Your father*, her mother finally said, after crying, and in a quieter voice, *was Jewish*. Her father had been dead for three years. Soon after this day her mother too would die. As the danger grew worse her gentile relatives would not harbor her any longer, and she joined the fate of those who tried to live in the margins, as if invisible, as if mere shadows, terrified of a direct glance, of recognition, existing at the unsteady boundary of consciousness.

In disowning the effects we have on others, we disown ourselves. My father watched the suffering of my childhood and did nothing. He was aware of my mother's alcoholism and the state of her mind when she drank. He knew my grandmother to be tyrannical. We could speak together of these things almost dispassionately, as if both of us were disinterested witnesses to a fascinating social drama. But after a day's visit with him, spent at the park, or riding horses, or at the movies, he would send me back into that world of suffering we had discussed so dispassionately.

His disinterest in my condition was not heartless. It reflected the distance he kept from his own experience. One could sense his suffering but he never expressed it directly. He was absent to a part of himself. He was closer to tears than many men, but he never shed those tears. If I cried he would fall into a frightened silence. And because of this, though I spent a great deal of time with him, he was always in a certain sense an absent father. Unknowingly I responded in kind, for years, feeling a vaguely defined anger that would neither let me love nor hate him.

My father learned his disinterest under the guise of masculinity. Boys don't cry. There are whole disciplines, institutions, rubrics in our culture which serve as categories of denial.

Science is such a category. The torture and death that Heinrich Himmler found disturbing to witness became acceptable to him when it fell under this rubric. He liked to watch the scientific experiments in the concentration camps. And then there is the rubric of military order. I am looking at a photograph. It was taken in 1941 in the Ukraine. The men of an *Einsatzgruppen* are assembled in a group pose. In front of them their rifles rest in ceremonial order, composed into tripods. They stand straight and tall. They are clean-shaven and their uniforms are immaculate, in *apple-pie order*, as we would say in America.

It is not surprising that cleanliness in a profession that sheds blood would become a compulsion. Blood would evidence guilt and fear to a mind trying to escape the consequence of its decisions. It is late in the night when Laura tells me one more story. Her father is about to be sent to Europe, where he will fight in the Battle of the Bulge and become a general. For weeks her mother has prepared a party. The guests begin to arrive in formal dress and sparkling uniforms. The white-gloved junior officers stand to open the doors. Her mother, regal in satin and jewels, starts to descend the staircase. Laura sits on the top stair watching, dressed in her pajamas. Then suddenly a pool of blood appears at her mother's feet, her mother falls to the floor, and almost as quickly, without a word uttered, a junior officer sweeps up the stairs, removes her mother into a waiting car, while another one cleans up the blood. No one tells Laura that her mother has had a miscarriage, and the party continues as if no event had taken place, no small or large death, as if no death were about to take place, nor any blood be spilled.

But the nature of the material world frustrates our efforts to remain free of the suffering of others. The mobile killing van that Himmler summoned into being had some defects. Gas from the exhaust pipes leaked into the cabin where the drivers sat and made them ill. When they went to remove the bodies from the van they were covered with blood and excrement, and their faces bore expressions of anguish. Himmler's engineers fixed the leak, increased the flow of gas so the deaths would be quicker, and built in a drain to collect the bodily fluids that are part of death.

There are times when no engineers can contain death. Over this same landscape through which the mobile killing vans traveled, an invisible cloud would one day spread, and from it would descend a toxic substance that would work its way into the soil and the water, the plants and the bodies of animals, and into human cells, not only in this landscape of the Ukraine, but in the fjords of Norway, the fields of Italy and France, and even here, in the far reaches of California, bringing a death that recalled, more than forty years later, those earlier hidden deaths.

You can see pictures of them. Whole families, whole communities. The fabric on their backs almost worn through. Bodies as if ebbing away before your eyes. Poised on an edge. The cold visible around the thin joints of arms and knees. A bed made in a doorway. Moving then, over time, deeper and deeper into the shadows. Off the streets. Into back rooms, and then to the attics or the cellars. Windows blackened. Given less and less to eat. Moving into smaller and smaller spaces. Sequestered away like forbidden thoughts, or secrets.

Could he have seen in these images of those he had forced into hiding and suffering, into agony and death, an image of the outer reaches of his own consciousness? It is only now that I can begin to see he has become part of them. Those whose fate he sealed. Heinrich Himmler. A part of Jewish history. Remembered by those who fell into the net of his unclaimed life.

Claimed as a facet of the wound, part of the tissue of the scar. A mark on the body of our minds, both those of us who know this history and those who do not.

For there is a sense in which we are all witnesses. Hunger, desperation, pain, loneliness, these are all visible in the streets about us. The way of life we live, a life we have never really chosen, forces us to walk past what we see. And out at the edge, beyond what we see or hear, we can feel a greater suffering, cries from a present or past starvation, a present or past torture, cries of those we have never met, coming to us in our dreams, and even if these cries do not survive in our waking knowledge, still, they live on in the part of ourselves we have ceased to know.

I think now of the missile again and how it came into being. Scientific inventions do not spring whole like Athena from the head of Zeus from the analytic implications of scientific discoveries. Technological advance takes shape slowly in the womb of society and is influenced and fed by our shared imagination. What we create thus mirrors the recesses of our own minds, and perhaps also hidden capacities. Television mimics the ability to see in the mind's eye. And the rocket? Perhaps the night flight of the soul, that ability celebrated in witches to send our thoughts as if through the air to those distant from us, to send images of ourselves, and even our secret feelings, out into an atmosphere beyond ourselves, to see worlds far flung from and strange to us becomes manifest in a sinister fashion in the missile.

Self-portrait in charcoal. Since the earliest rendering she made of her own image, much time has passed. The viewer here has moved closer. Now the artist's head fills the frame. She is much older in years and her features have taken on that androgyny which she thought necessary to the work of an artist. Her hair is white on the paper where the charcoal has not touched it. She is in profile and facing a definite direction. Her eyes look in that direction. But they do not focus on anyone or anything. The portrait is soft, the charcoal rubbed almost gently over the surface, here light, here dark. Her posture is one not so much of resolution as resignation. The portrait was drawn just after the First World War, the war in which her son Peter died. I have seen these eyes in the faces of those who grieve, eyes that are looking but not focused, seeing perhaps what is no longer visible.

After the war, German scientists who developed the V-1 and V-2 rocket immigrate to the United States where they continue to work on rocketry. Using the Vengeance weapon as a prototype, they develop the first ICBM missiles.

On the twenty-third of May 1945, as the war in Europe comes to an end, Heinrich Himmler is taken prisoner by the Allied command. He has removed the military insignia from his clothing, and he wears a patch over one eye. Disguised in this manner, and carrying the identity papers of a man he had condemned to death, he attempts to cross over the

border at Bremervörde. No one at the checkpoint suspects him of being the Reichsführer SS. But once under the scrutiny of the guards, all his courage fails him. Like a trembling schoolboy, he blurts out the truth. Now he will be taken to a center for interrogation, stripped of his clothing and searched. He will refuse to wear the uniform of the enemy, so he will be given a blanket to wrap over his underclothing. Taken to a second center for interrogation, he will be forced to remove this blanket and his underclothes. The interrogators, wishing to make certain he has no poison hidden anywhere, no means by which to end his life and hence avoid giving testimony, will surround his naked body. They will ask him to open his mouth. But just as one of them sees a black capsule wedged between his teeth, he will jerk his head away and swallow. All attempts to save his life will fail. He will not survive to tell his own story. His secrets will die with him.

There were many who lived through those years who did not wish to speak of what they saw or did. None of the German rocket engineers bore witness to what they saw at concentration camp Dora. Common rank and file members of the Nazi Party, those without whose efforts or silent support the machinery could not have gone on, fell almost as a mass into silence. In Berlin and Munich I spoke to many men and women, in my generation or younger, who were the children of soldiers, or party members, or SS men, or generals, or simply believers. Their parents would not speak to them of what had happened. The atmosphere in both cities was as if a pall had been placed over memory. And thus the shared mind of this nation has no roots, no continuous link with what keeps life in a pattern of meaning.

Lately I have come to believe that an as yet undiscovered human need and even a property of matter is the desire for revelation. The truth within us has a way of coming out despite all conscious efforts to conceal it. I have heard stories from those in the generation after the war, all speaking of the same struggle to ferret truth from the silence of their parents so that they themselves could begin to live. One born the year the war ended was never told a word about concentration camps, at home or in school. She began to wake in the early morning hours with nightmares which mirrored down to fine and accurate detail the conditions of the camps. Another woman searching casually through some trunks in the attic of her home found a series of pamphlets, virulently and cruelly anti-Semitic, which had been written by her grandfather, a high Nazi official. Still another pieced together the truth of her father's life, a member of the Gestapo, a man she remembered as playful by contrast to her stern mother. He died in the war. Only over time could she put certain pieces together. How he had had a man working under him beaten. And then, how he had beaten her.

Many of those who survived the holocaust could not bear the memories of what happened to them and, trying to bury the past, they too fell into silence. Others continue to speak as they are able. The manner of speech varies. At an artist's retreat in the Santa Cruz Mountains I met

a woman who survived Bergen Belsen and Auschwitz. She inscribes the number eight in many of her paintings. And the number two. This is the story she is telling with those numbers. It was raining the night she arrived with her mother, six brothers and sisters at Auschwitz. It fell very hard, she told me. We were walking in the early evening up a hill brown in the California fall. The path was strewn with yellow leaves illuminated by the sun in its descent. They had endured the long trip from Hungary to Poland, without food or water. They were very tired. Now the sky seemed very black but the platform, lit up with stadium lights, was blinding after the darkness of the train. She would never, she told me, forget the shouting. It is as if she still cannot get the sound out of her ears. The Gestapo gave one shrill order after another, in a language she did not yet understand. They were herded in confusion, blows coming down on them randomly from the guards, past a tall man in a cape. This was Dr. Mengele. He made a single gesture toward all her family and continued it toward her but in a different direction. For days, weeks, months after she had learned what their fate had been she kept walking in the direction of their parting and beyond toward the vanishing point of her vision of them.

There were seven from her family who died there that night. The eighth to die was her father. He was sent to a different camp and died on the day of liberation. Only two lived, she and one brother. The story of one life cannot be told separately from the story of other lives. Who are we? The question is not simple. What we call the self is part of a larger matrix of relationship and society. Had we been born to a different family, in a different time, to a different world, we would not be the same. All the lives that surround us are in us.



In the last decade the Soviet Union improves its antiballistic missiles to make them maneuverable and capable of hovering in midair. The United States continues to develop and test the MX missile, with advanced inertial guidance, capable of delivering ten prearmed electronically guided warheads, each with maneuverability, possessing the power and accuracy to penetrate hardened silos. And the Soviet Union begins to design a series of smaller one-warhead mobile missiles, the SS-25, to be driven around by truck, and the SS-X-24, to be drawn on railroad tracks. And the United States develops a new warhead for the Trident missile carrying fourteen smaller warheads that can be released in a barrage along a track or a road.

A train is making its way through Germany. All along its route those who are in the cars can look out and see those who are outside the cars. And those who are outside can see those who are inside. Sometimes words are exchanged. Sometimes there is a plea for water. And sometimes, at the risk of life, water is given. Sometimes names are called out, or curses are spoken, under the breath. And sometimes there is only silence.

Who are those on the inside and where are they going? There are rumors. It is best not to ask. There are potatoes to buy with the last of the

rations. There is a pot boiling on the stove. And, at any rate, the train has gone; the people have vanished. You did not know them. You will not see them again. Except perhaps in your dreams. But what do those images mean? Images of strangers. Agony that is not yours. A face that does not belong to you. And so in the daylight you try to erase what you have encountered and to forget those tracks that are laid even as if someplace in your body, even as part of yourself.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. One of the challenges a reader faces with Griffin's text is knowing what to make of it. It's a long piece, but the reading is not difficult. The sections are short and straightforward. While the essay is made up of fragments, the arrangement is not deeply confusing or disorienting. Still, the piece has no single controlling idea; it does not move from thesis to conclusion. One way of reading the essay is to see what one can make of it, what it might add up to. In this sense, the work of reading is to find one idea, passage, image, or metaphor — something in the text — and use this to organize the essay.

As you prepare to work back through the text, think about the point of reference you could use to organize your reading. Is the essay "about" Himmler? secrets? fascism? art? Germany? the United States? families and child-rearing? gay and lesbian sexuality? Can one of the brief sections be taken as a key to the text? What about the italicized sections — how are they to be used?

You should not assume that one of these is the right way to read. Assume, rather, that one way of working with the text is to organize it around a single point of reference, something you could say that Griffin "put there" for you to notice and to use.

Or you might want to do this in your name rather than Griffin's. That is, you might, as you reread, chart the connections *you* make, connections that you feel belong to you (to your past, your interests, your way of reading), and think about where and how you are drawn into the text (and with what you take to be Griffin's interests and desires). You might want to be prepared to talk about why you sum things up the way you do.

2. Although this is not the kind of prose you would expect to find in a textbook for a history course, and although the project is not what we usually think of as a "research" project, Griffin is a careful researcher. The project is serious and deliberate; it is "about" history, both family history and world history. Griffin knows what she is doing. So what *is* Griffin's project? As you reread, look to those sections where Griffin seems to be speaking to her readers about her work — about how she reads and how she writes, about how she gathers her materials and how she studies them. What is she doing? What is at stake in adopting such methods? How and why might you teach someone to do this work?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Griffin's text gathers together related fragments and works on them, but does so without yoking examples to a single, predetermined argument or thesis. In this sense, it is a kind of anti-essay. One of the difficulties readers of this text face is in its retelling. If someone says to you, "Well, what was it about?" the answer is not easy or obvious. The text is so far-reaching, so carefully composed of interrelated stories and reflections, and so suggestive in its implications and in the connections it enables that it is difficult to summarize without violence, without seriously reducing the text.

But, imagine that somebody asks, "Well, what was it about?" Write an essay in which you present your reading of "Our Secret." You want to give your reader a sense of what the text is like (or what it is like to read the text), and you want to make clear that the account you are giving is your reading, your way of working it through. You might, in fact, want to suggest what you leave out or put to the side. (The first second-reading question might help you prepare for this.)

2. Griffin argues that we — all of us, especially all of us who read her essay — are part of a complex web of connections. At one point she says,

Who are we? The question is not simple. What we call the self is part of a larger matrix of relationship and society. Had we been born to a different family, in a different time, to a different world, we would not be the same. All the lives that surround us are in us. (p. 381)

At another point she asks, "Is there any one of us who can count ourselves outside the circle circumscribed by our common past?" She speaks of a "field,"

like a field of gravity that is created by the movements of many bodies. Each life is influenced and it in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is a cause is also an effect. Childhood experience is just one element in the determining field. (p. 356)

One way of thinking about this concept of the self (and of interrelatedness), at least under Griffin's guidance, is to work on the connections that she implies and asserts. As you reread the selection, look for powerful and surprising juxtapositions, fragments that stand together in interesting and suggestive ways. Think about the arguments represented by the blank space between those sections. (And look for Griffin's written statements about "relatedness.") Look for connections that seem important to the text (and to you) and representative of Griffin's thinking (and yours). Then write an essay in which you use these examples to think through your understanding of Griffin's claims for this "larger matrix," the "determining field," or our "common past."

3. It is useful to think of Griffin's prose as experimental. She is trying to do something that she can't do in the "usual" essay form. She wants to make a different kind of argument or engage her reader in a different manner. And so she mixes

personal and academic writing. She assembles fragments and puts seemingly unrelated material into surprising and suggestive relationships. She breaks the “plane” of the page with italicized intersections. She organizes her material, but not in the usual mode of thesis-example-conclusion. The arrangement is not nearly so linear. At one point, when she seems to be prepared to argue that German child-rearing practices produced the Holocaust, she quickly says:

Of course there cannot be one answer to such a monumental riddle, nor does any event in history have a single cause. Rather a field exists, like a field of gravity that is created by the movements of many bodies. Each life is influenced and it in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is a cause is also an effect. Childhood experience is just one element in the determining field. (p. 356)

Her prose serves to create a “field,” one where many bodies are set in relationship.

It is useful, then, to think about Griffin’s prose as the enactment of a method, as a way of doing a certain kind of intellectual work. One way to study this, to feel its effects, is to imitate it, to take it as a model. For this assignment, write a Griffin-like essay, one similar in its methods of organization and argument. You will need to think about the stories you might tell, about the stories and texts you might gather (stories and texts not your own). As you write, you will want to think carefully about arrangement and about commentary (about where, that is, you will speak to your reader *as* the writer of the piece). You should not feel bound to Griffin’s subject matter, but you should feel that you are working in her spirit.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? (p. 318)

— MICHEL FOUCAULT, “Panopticism”

The child, Dr. Schreber advised, *should be permeated by the impossibility of locking something in his heart. . . .*

That this philosophy was taught in school gives me an interior view of the catastrophe to follow. It adds a certain dimension to my image of these events to know that a nation of citizens learned that no part of themselves could be safe from the scrutiny of authority, nothing locked in the heart, and at the same time to discover that the head of the secret police of this nation was the son of a schoolmaster. It was this man, after all, Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, who was later to say, speaking of the mass arrests of Jews, *Protective custody is an act of care.* (p. 358)

— SUSAN GRIFFIN, “Our Secret”

Both Griffin and Foucault write about the “fabrication” of human life and desire within the operations of history and of specific social institutions—the family,

the school, the military, the factory, the hospital. Both are concerned with the relationship between forces that are hidden, secret, and those that are obvious, exposed. Both write with an urgent concern for the history of the present, for the ways our current condition is tied to history, politics, and culture.

And yet these are very different pieces to read. They are written differently—that is, they differently invite a reader's participation and understanding. They take different examples from history. They offer different accounts of the technologies of order and control. It can even be said that they do their work differently and that they work toward different ends.

Write an essay in which you use one of the essays to explain and to investigate the other—where you use Griffin as a way of thinking about Foucault or Foucault as a way of thinking about Griffin. "To explain," "to investigate"—perhaps you would prefer to think of this encounter as a dialogue or a conversation, a way of bringing the two texts together. You should imagine that your readers are familiar with both texts, but have not yet thought of the two together. You should imagine that your readers do not have the texts in front of them, that you will need to do the work of presentation and summary.

2. We might read both Joy Castro's work (p. 206) and Susan Griffin's "Our Secret" as containing elements of autobiography. Each writer relies on stories from her own life to demonstrate the relationship between one individual life and the larger cultural and political implications. Griffin writes, "To a certain kind of mind, what is hidden away ceases to exist" (p. 374). As readers, we are struck by the ways this statement (and so many of Griffin's statements) pertains both to her own life story and to the larger historical narrative of the Holocaust.

Reread both Castro and Griffin, looking for sentences and phrases that seem to work on two levels (the personal and the political/cultural). Which sentences or phrases suggest to you that they are both about the writer's life *and* about all of our lives, about the world? How can you tell?

Write an essay in which you illuminate, through the work of these two writers, the relationship between one life and what happens in the world at large. How do these writers help us understand ourselves as individuals and also as parts of larger systems, cultures, or worlds?

3. John Edgar Wideman, in "Our Time" (p. 603), uses personal history to think about and to represent forces beyond the individual that shape human life and possibility—family, national history, and race. Susan Griffin is engaged in a similar project; she explains her motives this way: "One can find traces of every life in each life."

Perhaps. It is a bold step to think that this is true and to believe that one can, or should, write the family into the national or international narrative. Write an essay in which you read "Our Secret" alongside Wideman's "Our Time." Your goal is not only to discuss how these writers do what they do, and to what conclusions and to what ends, but also to discuss your sense of what is at stake in each project. How does a skilled writer handle such a project? What are the technical issues? What would lead a writer to write like this? Would you do the same? Where and how? For whose benefit?



AUBREY Hirsch

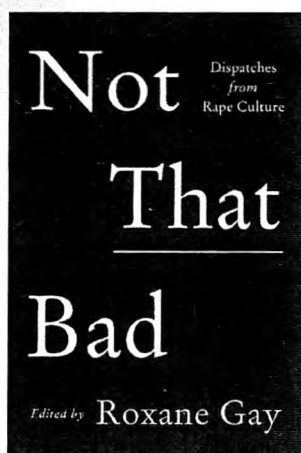
An essayist and comic writer from Cleveland, Ohio, Aubrey Hirsch now resides in Berkeley, California, where she produces art in many senses of the word. She is the author of the short story collection, *Why We Never Talk about Sugar* (2013), and *This Will Be His Legacy* (2014), a chapbook of flash fiction. Published frequently and widely, her work can be found in publications including *The New York Times*, *The Rumpus*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and *The Florida Review*, among others. Her work has been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize, and she has also been a finalist in Glimmer Train's Fiction Open and a runner up for the Micro Award. Hirsch holds an MFA from the University of Pittsburgh, and has taught writing and literature courses at Chatham University, Georgia College and State University, The Colorado College, and Oberlin College.

Reflecting on her series of flash fiction celebrity portraits in a 2011 interview, Hirsch says, "The line between 'fact' and 'fiction' is something I think a lot about. They're both fickle terms and there's a lot of gray area between them. . . . I'm more interested in the fiction that lies around and in between the recorded facts: little details, inner thoughts, hidden motivations, and so on." In the essay that follows, Hirsch advances past this early boundary blurring and writes clean, painful prose that is surely hers and surely truth. "Fragments" appears in Roxane Gay's *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*, an anthology that includes "pieces that address what

it means to live in a world where women have to measure the harassment, violence, and aggression they face, and where they are 'routinely second-guessed, blown off, discredited, denigrated, besmirched, belittled, patronized, mocked, shamed, gaslit, insulted, bullied' for speaking out."

Hirsch's voice, her narrative, rests alongside other stories that are the same and not the same, that speak uniquely about shared violence. Hirsch distances herself from this brutality by writing her experiences into existence in the second person, a rhetorical move which simultaneously challenges readers to find themselves in her words: "You drink too much at the party because it's college and you're always drinking too much." She spends the entirety of "Fragments" studying herself—and the men who know and love and harm her—under a micro-

scope. Hirsch is a careful scientist, teasing apart good intentions from their impact, the latter of which is often terror, debilitation, and a vastly different life course.



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Fragments

He says, "You shouldn't wave those around like that."

You're in the campus dining hall with your friend James. You've just popped a rust-colored birth control pill out of its slot in the rubbery blue envelope.

You say, "I wasn't. I was just taking one."

He says, "You should take them in your room. By yourself. Privately."

"I have to take them with food," you say, "or they make my stomach hurt." It's been that way since you were fifteen and first started taking them. That was years before you actually have sex and, even when you do, you are so afraid of getting pregnant accidentally that you don't let a man come inside you until after you're married.

You take them because your period is a terrifying beast. The hormones gallop through your veins. You wake up in the middle of the night, twisting; your stomach lurches, your intestines heave. The pills help. You don't like taking them every day, though. Even the smell of the blue rubber envelope makes you a little queasy when you, dutifully, pull them out of your purse at the same time every afternoon to sedate the beast inside.

He says, "Still, you shouldn't let everyone see. You don't want some guy to see you taking those and think he can take advantage of you and there will be no consequences."

You put the pill on the back of your tongue and the envelope back in your bag. James watches as you bring your water glass to your lips. You swallow. Hard.

If rape culture had a flag, it would be one of those "boob inspector" T-shirts.

If rape culture had its own cuisine, it would be all this shit you have to swallow.

If rape culture had a downtown, it would smell like Axe body spray and that perfume they put on tampons to make your vagina smell like laundry detergent.

If rape culture had an official language, it would be locker-room jokes and an awkward laugh track. Rape culture speaks in every tongue.

If rape culture had a national sport, it would be . . . well . . . something with balls, for sure.

You drink too much at the party because it's college and you're always drinking too much. The party is terribly generic with beer pong and a bass-heavy sound track. Everyone is drinking foamy beer out of red Solo cups. You think there might even be a black light somewhere. •

**RAPE CULTURE SPEAKS
IN EVERY TONGUE.**

Daniel knows you don't drink beer, so he has brought you a bottle of cheap vodka, which you drink mixed with even cheaper orange juice.

You flit around for a while, talking to one group of people, then another. A boy in the kitchen—a baseball player—takes his dick out to show everyone how big it is. It is, in fact, very big.

The last thing you remember is lying down on the couch. *Just to close my eyes, you think, just for a minute.*

When you wake up, you are in a bed in an upstairs bedroom you have never seen. Daniel is in the bed next to you. Your clothes are on, but your shoes are off.

"Hey," you say, pressing into your temples. Maybe if you press them hard enough the pounding will stop.

"You fell asleep," he says, before you even ask. "I carried you up here."

You say, "You carried me?"

"Yeah. I didn't want to just leave you down there with all those dudes, passed out on the couch like bait or something."

"Did you take my shoes off?"

"Yeah. So you could sleep."

Your mouth feels dry. Everything is blurry. You rub your eyes and take in a breath so you can thank Daniel when he says, "I took your contacts out, too."

You don't know where your gratitude goes, but suddenly it's gone.

These stories aren't worth telling. There's no arc to them, no dramatic climax. There's nothing at stake, not really. You imagine your listener, leaning in, "And then what happened?" And you have to say, "Nothing. That's the whole story." "Oh," she says, her mouth a firm line.

These are little bits of things that happened, or things you think about. They're light on tension, you know that. There's no real peril. There's no resolution.

Still, they stick with you. You think about them even after they're over, sometimes for a long time. Sometimes for a very long time. That's how you know they're important somehow. It's why you can recall the smell of that party, even many years after the smell of your grandfather's cologne has faded from your memory.

When you become a writing instructor, eventually, you end up with stories about rape stories.

The first story is a rape story on purpose. A student hands it in for a fiction assignment in the composition class you are teaching. In it, the hero finds his petite, brunette English teacher alone in a church. He pulls out a 24k gold-plated gun with a pearl handle, holds it to her head, and rapes her, bending her over the back of a pew. When he's finished, he drives off in a convertible and leaves a bag of money at the police station to avoid arrest.

You are the petite, brunette English teacher. You're only twenty-two, just a few years older than this student who now sits in your office with his hat pulled down over his eyes. You're too timid to call him out on this

threatening misogynistic bullshit. What if you're wrong? What if he complains to your boss? What if he gives you a low score on your teaching evaluations? Instead, you critique the story, which isn't hard: It's a horrible story. "The hero is unlikable and the ending is ludicrous." You say all this to your student as he smirks beside you. "And look here," you say, "a slip in verb tense; here, a comma splice."

In the second rape story, the hero meets a girl at a party. She's beautiful, drunk, glassy-eyed, and nearly incoherent. When she's no longer able to walk, the hero, who hasn't had anything to drink, carries her outside, to the beach. He strips off her clothes and has sex with her while she makes soft moaning sounds. Then he dresses her again and lies beside her on the sand.

"The tone is a bit confusing," you tell your student when he comes in for a conference. "It seems romantic, almost. Are we supposed to feel sympathy for this character, even as he's raping her?"

The student looks taken back, surprised. "He's not raping her. They're having sex."

You point out all of the evidence that he is, in fact, raping her. She's clearly very drunk. She can't even walk by herself. She never takes any agency, just lies there while it's happening.

The student cuts you off. "This is, like, based off me hooking up with my girlfriend for the first time."

It hadn't occurred to you that the student might not have realized he was writing a rape story.

"All I can say," you say, "is that a lot of people are going to read this as rape."

"But it isn't," he says, weakly, sounding more like he's trying to convince himself than you. "It wasn't."

The third story comes to you in a creative nonfiction class. The narrator gets very drunk at a party. She kisses one guy and another kisses her. She runs away and bumps into an acquaintance, who she barely recognizes through a haze of cheap beer. He is aggressive, putting his penis inside of her while she tries to stammer, "wait, wait."

You start the workshop by asking your students to give a quick summary of the piece. Someone offers, "It's about a girl who goes to a party and gets drunk and hooks up with a bunch of dudes."

Interesting. "Does anyone have anything to add or a different read?" The students shake their heads. "Well," you offer, "I think this first part is a hookup, and the second part, maybe a misunderstanding, but I read this last section pretty straightforwardly as being assault."

All of the students look down, rereading the last section. Some of them tilt their heads, as if to say, *Hm*. The essay never uses the word *rape*, but it does say "wrong." It says "wasted" and "sick" and "dizzy" and "vomit." It says "ignore." How is it possible they haven't seen this? How is it possible they are learning about consent from their teacher?

The author of the essay is forbidden to speak by the rules of the workshop, but you study her as she takes notes in silence. Did she know? you wonder. Does she know now?

You recognize the tension between “I am a body” and “I have a body,” but you are unable to resolve it. “Have” implies that this body is just a possession, that it can be lost or thrown away. That you can do without it. It implies, perhaps, that someone else could have your body and that your body would be not your own. That it would belong to another.

That doesn’t feel quite right.

But “am” doesn’t seem right either. To “be” a body suggests that you are only a body. You are meat and some blood. You are hard bones and flexing cartilage. You are tangled veins and skin. Is that all, though?

You stand in front of the full-length mirror on your closet door and take inventory. Here are your knees; there are two of them. Two elbows. A chin. A torso with breasts that are heavy with milk. Feet. Hands. Knuckles. Two earlobes. Ten toenails. Several dime-sized bruises. Thousands and thousands of hairs.

There are things you can’t see, but you know they’re there. Two lungs. A liver. The stacked cups of your backbone. Your heart you saw once on an ultrasound machine. Your womb you’ve seen four times, but never when it was empty. Nerves. Ball joints. The intricate pleating of your brain.

It is a long list, but also, it is not so long. Looking at it now, you wonder, isn’t there more to you than that?

Sometimes people tell you that you’re lucky that you have sons so they won’t have to deal with all this crap.

It’s true that your kids, by virtue of both being boys, will be in a privileged position, but the idea that they “won’t have to deal” with rape culture makes you shudder. You very much want them to “deal with” rape culture the way one “deals with” a cockroach problem.

Sometimes you think about what you’ll tell them and come up surprisingly blank. It’s the words that fail you, not the ideas. The ideas are there.

Though you aren’t sure exactly what you’ll say, these are the things you want them to know:

It’s not okay to hit the girl you like. And it’s not okay to hit the girl you love.

The world around you tells women that they should always nod politely no matter what they’re feeling inside. Don’t ever take a polite nod for an answer. Wait for her to yell it: “Yes!”

**A RELATIONSHIP IS NOT YOUR
REWARD FOR BEING A NICE GUY, NO
MATTER WHAT THE MOVIES TELL YOU.**

Not everyone gets sex when they want it. Not everyone gets love when they want it. This is true for men and women. A relationship is not your reward for being a nice guy, no matter what the movies tell you.

Birth control is your job, too.

Don’t ever use an insult for a woman that you wouldn’t use for a man. Say “jerk” or “shithead” or “asshole.” Don’t say “bitch” or “whore” or “slut.” If you say “asshole,” you’re criticizing her parking skills. If you say “bitch,” you’re criticizing her gender.

Here are some phrases you will need to know. Practice them in the mirror until they come as easy as songs you know by heart: "Do you want to?" "That's not funny, man." "Does that feel good?" "I like you, but I think we're both a little drunk. Here's my number. Let's get together another time."

Your cousin texts you out of the blue to say, "I just got raped at the bank."

"Oh my God," you respond. "Are you okay?" Your brain goes turbo. You are trying to imagine which hospital she's at, if she's likely to press charges, why she's reaching out to you and what you can possibly do to make this any less devastating.

The flashing ellipses appears on your phone to signal that she's typing. Then it turns to words that you struggle to focus on: "Yeah. I deposited my check in the wrong account so I've been overspending on my debit card. I got like \$175 in fees."

You watch for the ellipses, but it doesn't appear. After a moment you realize this is the whole story. By "I got raped" she meant "I got charged bank fees for overdrawing my account."

You stare at your keyboard for a while, with its letters and exclamation points and frozen-faced emojis, and then you put your phone away. You can't think of a single thing to say.

Jordana has invented a new kind of rape-prevention underwear. If she orders a batch of five thousand pairs, she can manufacture them for \$2.25 per pair and wholesale them for \$4.00 per pair. If she orders ten thousand pairs, she can manufacture them for \$1.90 per pair and wholesale them for \$3.50. Given these figures, and assuming no import taxes, how will she get the rapists to wear them?

Marc leaves work at 6:25 every evening. Moving at a steady 6 miles per hour, he walks eleven blocks north, three blocks west, and one block south to get to his apartment. On his way home, he passes the diner where Gina works. When she works the afternoon swing shift, she leaves work just before Marc passes by. She walks eight blocks north at an average speed of 5.5 miles per hour. Now that it's wintertime and starting to get dark, how far behind Gina should Marc stay so that she won't be afraid that he's coming to attack her?

Carla is editing her online dating profile. When she adds the word *cheerleader*, her message requests go up by 11 percent. When she changes her body type from "average" to "thin," her message requests increase by 42 percent. When she lists "feminism" as an interest, her message requests decrease by 86 percent and the number of rape threats she receives triples. Assuming she goes on an average of three dates per month, how many hours will she need to spend with any given man before she feels comfortable giving him her home address?

A child is raped in Montana. The rapist is thirty-one; the child is fifteen. The age of consent is sixteen. The punishment for statutory rape in Montana is two to one hundred years in prison and a fine of up to

\$50,000. If, however, the rapist is only sentenced to thirty days in jail and no fine at all, how much older than her chronological age must the child have been behaving when she seduced him?

This is your new thing: When a man yells at you on the street, you yell back. You are tired of pretending you can't hear these men. You are tired of gluing your eyes to the sidewalk in shame. You are tired of taking it, of treating it like a tax you must pay for the privilege of being a woman in public spaces.

You think, perhaps foolishly, that you can explain your feelings to these men and they will listen.

You wear your resolve like armor and it doesn't take long for you to get a chance to put your plan into action. You are leaving the store, a plastic bag of groceries dangling from each hand, when a man walking behind you says, "Hey hey hey! You are beautiful."

You stop walking and he passes you. It's now or never.

You say, "Can I talk to you for a second?"

He stops to face you, about three feet away.

"Why did you say that to me?"

Instead of answering, he just tries his line again: "Hey beautiful girl!"

"Can I tell you something?"

He doesn't answer, but he doesn't move away. He seems confused, like when you push a floor button on an elevator and the doors don't close, so you just keep pressing it. Why aren't you shutting up? This isn't what's supposed to happen.

You say, "When you say that to me, I don't feel flattered, I don't even feel angry, honestly. I feel afraid. Did you know that?"

"Why? Why are you afraid? Afraid of me?"

"Yes," you say. "When men like you yell stuff at me on the street, I am afraid that you will hurt me."

"Oh, I'm scary. Is that what you're saying?" Now, he moves. He takes a big step toward you and, damn it, you flinch.

You say, "Yes," trying to plate the word in steel but it crumbles in your larynx like tinfoil. You start walking to your car.

He follows you the whole way, shouting, "Now I'm scaring you, huh? How you're afraid of me!"

He's right. He is scaring you. You are afraid. But there's something new, too. Before this, you really thought maybe these guys just didn't know how

their comments made people feel. You thought maybe they were trying to be nice. But now you know the truth—they know it makes you feel frightened. They like it.

There's still fear, yes, but now there's anger, too. So much anger that it boxes out

some of your fear. The next time you yell back to the man yelling at you, it's easier. And the time after that is easier still.

**BUT NOW YOU KNOW THE
TRUTH — THEY KNOW IT MAKES YOU
FEEL FRIGHTENED. THEY LIKE IT.**

Now the responses roll off your tongue like perfect round stones. You've worried them in your mind and in your mouth until they are smooth as glass: "Why would you say that to me?" "That is an offensive thing to say." "It's hurtful to talk to women like that." "You should never say that again."

Your prize for all this effort is a small thing, but you cherish it. It is the astonishment on your harasser's face. Sometimes he even mutters a flimsy "Sorry" before he hurries away from you. He doesn't want a conversation. He's not shouting at you as a method of engagement; he's just testing something out. He needs to fumble around for his power in the dark, like a totem he carries in his pocket. He wants to make sure it's still there.

Next time, you tell yourself when it's done, this man won't shout so readily. Next time he will see the woman coming, open his mouth to speak and for one second, one perfect second, he will be afraid of her.



QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Despite this essay's short length, Aubrey Hirsch frequently incorporates white space on the page. Return to this piece, searching for those moments of white space. Read around them. How do these spaces help or impact your reading experience? What could they possibly be saying? How do they function? How do they advance Hirsch's argument?
2. Writers often commiserate with one another about the difficulty of titles, of assigning a name to their writing. Still, we know that titles do lots of heavy lifting for readers, as they are the first few words that establish what the reading experience will, or could, be like. The title of Hirsch's essay is a single word. How important is that word? What did it mean to you before your reading experience? What does it mean to you now that you've read your way through this essay? What else could Hirsch have named this piece?
3. Reread "Fragments" paying special attention to its narrative voice. Notice when and how Hirsch moves between first and second person perspectives. What kind of effect does this have on you, the reader? What, in your view, is the difference between this essay being written as "you" versus "I"? Does the essay's content necessitate this fluid movement between the two? Why do you think Hirsch chose to tell this story this way?
4. Look again at Hirsch's essay, identifying scenes of dialogue. Even in just a few brief pages, Hirsch packs this piece with voices. How do you see dialogue working in "Fragments"? How does it aid Hirsch's argument? What kinds of people does Hirsch allow to speak? Are there characters that are silent?

. . . ● . . .

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Hirsch's piece is from a larger essay collection, edited by another of the authors in our anthology, Roxane Gay. The essay collection is entitled *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*. For this assignment, we invite you to think about "rape culture"—what it means and how it functions in society as you understand it. You should begin with Hirsch's essay: how does she understand rape culture? You might then move to the Internet to do some of your own reading. How is the term used in media and news? Write an essay in which you detail for your readers a thorough understanding of "rape culture" by turning to Hirsch's essay, in addition to other sources.

Your essay should reflect your intellectual and political understanding of the term, but you should also consider your own perspectives. Where do you see demonstrations of rape culture in your own consumption of popular media or in your own experiences of the world? What do you think can be done to convince skeptics that rape culture exists and that there are things they should do about it? This collection remains a bestseller; why do you suppose this collection was necessary and why has it continued to resonate?

2. Hirsch makes several interesting and unconventional moves in the essay that draw from formulas and fields that might seem removed from the practice of writing, namely logic conditionals and mathematics word problems. She writes, in a list of conditions, for example, "If rape culture had a flag, it would be one of those 'boob inspector' T-shirts" (p. 387). And later, she offers her take on word problems: "Carla is editing her online dating profile. When she adds the word *cheerleader*, her message requests increase by 42 percent" (p. 391). Hirsch continues with the word problem layout and finally asks: "Assuming she goes on an average of three dates per month, how many hours will she need to spend with any given man before she feels comfortable giving him her home address?" (p. 391).

Compose your own piece of writing in which you continue one of these forms that Hirsch begins. Choose a subject that is meaningful to you, and try to convey your perspective on that subject using either a series of word problems or a list of conditionals like the ones Hirsch uses. You could also do some combination of both. This is both a creative and critical writing assignment in that you are trying to convey your argument(s) through unconventional means. Once you've written a series of these conditionals or word problems, write a postscript in which you consider the question: What did these unusual forms make possible? Why do you suppose Hirsch decides to include these in her essay? What impact did they have in your own writing?

3. Hirsch devotes some discussion in this piece to thinking about her two sons. While she struggles to know exactly how to talk to them, she offers a list of things she wants them to know. She proceeds to give her sons advice: she

would want them “to ‘deal with’ rape culture the way one ‘deals with’ a cockroach problem.”

For this essay, we invite you to address a young child you imagine as your own (whether or not you have children or intend to). Imagine this child as belonging to specific identity categories and compose a list of advice on the subject of rape culture and sexual violence. What does Hirsch say to her sons? What might you say to your sons, your daughters, your genderqueer or transgender children, etc.? What do you imagine they will need to hear, know, and understand? Finally, in a short reflective piece, provide some comments on your list of advice. What does the list suggest to you about this subject? Given the list you have come up with, what (in a larger cultural sense) needs to be done?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Both Aubrey Hirsch and Scaachi Koul (p. 417) take up the issue of rape culture in different ways. Reread both essays, noting for yourself the moments where each writer attempts to define and describe rape culture in America. Write an essay in which you discuss both writers' approach to the subject. In what ways do they appear to approach the subject differently? One way to think about that question is to think about what you might describe as each writer's method or way of seeing. In what ways do the forms and styles of their work seem to differ or align?

In this essay, we are not asking you to draw any conclusions about which essay *is* better or which one you like better. We are inviting you to think about each writers' choices in their writing. You'll want to cite specific passages from the readings to illustrate which moments you think demonstrate the approaches you describe. And finally, you'll want to discuss how these approaches might help Hirsch and Koul write about a very difficult subject.

As we note in the “Introduction,” many of the essays in this collection take on difficult subject matter that can be hard to read about, confront, or even articulate to begin with. One might even say that every essay in this reader is “difficult” in some way, in its subject matter, theoretical approach, language, form. Difficulty is not merely a matter of dense language or accessibility in a piece of writing. Difficulty is also the condition of a writer's challenge: to represent through language what seems difficult to articulate or represent. Another way to think of this is to think about the ways our culture encourages us *not* to think about difficult subjects—or even to simplify them rather than represent them in their complexity.

2. As you reread Hirsch, note your own reading responses. At what moments was the essay “difficult” to read? What do you think made it difficult to read? We invite you to consider features of the text itself *and* characteristics of

your own dispositions as a reader and human being that might make certain moments more or less difficult to read.

Then, consider another essay or two in this collection that has given you difficulty. Write an essay in which you consider the question: what makes a text difficult to read? You can explore this question as one of subject matter, density, or form. Or all of those. This is a moment for you to define: What do you mean by difficulty? How have you experienced difficulty as a reader? And what can you learn from your own experiences of difficulty? If you have written about this question before, how has reading Hirsch's essay changed or complicated your concept of difficulty?

3. In this essay, Hirsch poses a number of very interesting questions. For example, Hirsch poses a deeply philosophical question as a kind of paradox about the body. She writes:

You recognize the tension between "I am a body" and "I have a body," but you are unable to resolve it. "Have" implies that this body is just a possession, that it can be lost or thrown away. That you can do without it. It implies, perhaps, that someone else could have your body and that your body would be not your own. That it would belong to another.

That doesn't feel quite right.

But "am" doesn't seem right either. To "be" a body suggests that you are only a body. You are meat and some blood. You are hard bones and flexing cartilage. You are tangled veins and skin. Is that all, though? (p. 390)

Write an essay in which you take up one of this line of questioning. Your goal is to explore this question about "being" a body versus "having" a body. You do not need to pose one answer — and perhaps it would be naïve to think you could — instead, you want to understand why the question of "being" versus "having" a body is a question in the first place. Why is Hirsch posing these questions? Why might they be important? What kinds of speculations might you make as to how we might approach thinking about possible answers? Why are these questions central or important to Hirsch's overall writing goals as you understand them? You will also want to bring another writer into this conversation. Scaachi Koul, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Judith Butler (in very different ways) might offer lenses through which you might think about the question. Put one of these authors in conversation with Hirsch's question about the body. What might they say? How does their work help in thinking through and exploring the question?

JUNE Jordan



Chris Felver/Premium Archive/Getty Images

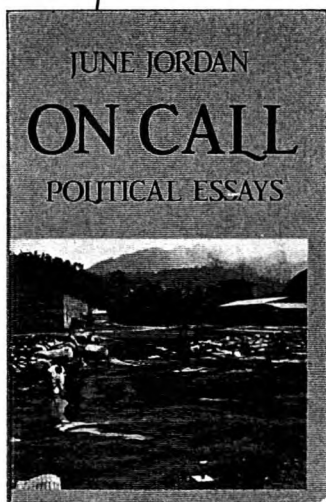
Prolific poet, essayist, journalist, and activist June Jordan was born in Harlem, New York, in 1936 and spent a lifetime publishing award-winning books, giving poetry readings, and pursuing issues of political and social justice. Jordan started writing poems in her young childhood and later carried this talent with her through her time at Barnard College and her long career as a writer and teacher.

"Of her [Jordan's] career, Toni Morrison writes, 'I am talking about a span of forty years of tireless activism coupled with and fueled by flawless art.'" A champion of women's, civil, and lesbian and gay rights, Jordan was firmly anti-war and frequently folded these perspectives into her creative work. Her writerly interests were as diverse as her activism, and Jordan has been described as having "a vision of liberation for all people," of being "a lyrical catalyst for change."

Jordan authored children's books, lyrics, plays, and musicals. Some of her most notable publications include *Directed by Desire: The Complete Poems of June Jordan* (2005), *Some of Us Did Not Die* (2003), *Affirmative Acts: Political Essays* (1998), *Technical Difficulties: African-American Notes on the State of the Union* (1992), and *On Call: Political Essays* (1985), from which this essay is taken. Jordan received many awards throughout her career, including a Rockefeller Foundation grant, the National Association of Black Journalists Award, an NEA Fellowship, and a congressional citation for her outstanding contributions to literature and the civil rights movement.

In her career as an educator, Jordan taught at the City College of New York, Yale University, and Sarah Lawrence College. She directed The Poetry Center at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and founded Poetry for the People in her tenure as professor of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

In a 1995 interview, Jordan calls love "a deeply appreciative and enthusiastic awareness of somebody else," before elaborating, "It's what we're living for and that's what I'm fighting for. I think of myself as a political person doing whatever I do, but basically what I aim for is to make love a reasonable possibility. . . . My commitment to love is not an alternative to my political commitments. It's the same thing."



In the following selection, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You¹ and the Future Life of Willie Jordan," Jordan takes an strong stance regarding the use of Black English in the academy, but, more than this, keeps love — of language, of writing, of culture, of teaching — at the center of her work. Just as Jordan believed and intended, the two — politics and love — cannot be cleaved.

.....

Nobody Mean More to Me Than You¹ and the Future Life of Willie Jordan

Black English is not exactly a linguistic buffalo; as children, most of the thirty-five million Afro-Americans living here depend on this language for our discovery of the world. But then we approach our maturity inside a larger social body that will not support our efforts to become anything other than the clones of those who are neither our mothers nor our fathers. We begin to grow up in a house where every true mirror shows us the face of somebody who does not belong there, whose walk and whose talk will never look or sound "right," because that house was meant to shelter a family that is alien and hostile to us. As we learn our way around this environment, either we hide our original word habits, or we completely surrender our own voice, hoping to please those who will never respect anyone different from themselves: Black English is not exactly a linguistic buffalo, but we should understand its status as an endangered species, as a perishing, irreplaceable system of community intelligence, or we should expect its extinction, and, along with that, the extinguishing of much that constitutes our own proud, and singular, identity.

What we casually call "English," less and less defers to England and its "gentlemen." "English" is no longer a specific matter of geography or an element of class privilege; more than thirty-three countries use this tool as a means of "intranational communication."² Countries as disparate as Zimbabwe and Malaysia, or Israel and Uganda, use it as their non-native currency of convenience. Obviously, this tool, this "English," cannot function inside thirty-three discrete societies on the basis of rules and values absolutely determined somewhere else, in a thirty-fourth other country, for example.

In addition to that staggering congeries of non-native users of English, there are five countries, or 333,746,000 people, for whom this thing called "English" serves as a native tongue.³ Approximately 10 percent of these native speakers of "English" are Afro-American citizens of the U.S.A. I cite these numbers and varieties of human beings dependent on "English" in order, quickly, to suggest how strange and how tenuous is any concept of "Standard English." Obviously, numerous forms of English now operate inside a natural, an uncontrollable, continuum of development. I would suppose "the standard" for English in Malaysia is not the same as "the standard" in Zimbabwe. I know that standard forms of English for Black

people in this country do not copy that of Whites. And, in fact, the structured differences between these two kinds of English have intensified, becoming more Black, or less White, despite the expected homogenizing effects of television⁴ and other mass media.

Nonetheless, White standards of English persist, supreme and unquestioned, in these United States. Despite our multi-lingual population, and despite the deepening Black and White cleavage within that conglomerate, White standards control our official and popular judgments of verbal proficiency and correct, or incorrect, language skills, including speech. In contrast to India, where at least fourteen languages co-exist as legitimate Indian languages, in contrast to Nicaragua, where all citizens are legally entitled to formal school instruction in their regional or tribal

**WHITE STANDARDS OF ENGLISH
PERSIST, SUPREME AND
UNQUESTIONED, IN THESE
UNITED STATES.**

languages, compulsory education in America compels accommodation to exclusively White forms of "English." White English, in America, is "Standard English."

This story begins two years ago. I was teaching a new course, "In Search of the Invisible Black Woman," and my rather large class seemed evenly divided among young

Black women and men. Five or six White students also sat in attendance. With unexpected speed and enthusiasm we had moved through historical narratives of the 19th century to literature by and about Black women, in the 20th. I had assigned the first forty pages of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and I came, eagerly, to class that morning:

"So!" I exclaimed, aloud. "What did you think? How did you like it?"

The students studied their hands, or the floor. There was no response. The tense, resistant feeling in the room fairly astounded me.

At last, one student, a young woman still not meeting my eyes, muttered something in my direction:

"What did you say?" I prompted her.

"Why she have them talk so funny. It don't sound right."

"You mean the language?"

Another student lifted his head: "It don't look right, neither. I couldn't hardly read it."

At this, several students dumped on the book. Just about unanimously, their criticisms targeted the language. I listened to what they wanted to say and silently marvelled at the similarities between their casual speech patterns and Alice Walker's written version of Black English.

But I decided against pointing to these identical traits of syntax; I wanted not to make them self-conscious about their own spoken language—not while they clearly felt it was "wrong." Instead I decided to swallow my astonishment. Here was a negative Black reaction to a prize-winning accomplishment of Black literature that White readers across the country had selected as a best seller. Black rejection was aimed at the one irreducibly Black element of Walker's work: the language—Celie's Black English. I wrote the opening lines of *The Color Purple* on the

blackboard and asked the students to help me translate these sentences into Standard English:

You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.

Last spring after Little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say it too soon, Fonso. I aint well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say, Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead, an all of the children.⁵

Our process of translation exploded with hilarity and even hysterical, shocked laughter: The Black writer, Alice Walker, knew what she was doing! If rudimentary criteria for good fiction include the manipulation of language so that the syntax and diction of sentences will tell you the identity of speakers, the probable age and sex and class of speakers, and even the locale—urban/rural/southern/western—then Walker had written, perfectly. This is the translation into Standard English that our class produced:

Absolutely, one should never confide in anybody besides God. Your secrets could prove devastating to your mother.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I have always been good. But now, could you help me to understand what is happening to me?

Last spring, after my little brother, Lucious, was born, I heard my parents fighting. My father kept pulling at my mother's arm. But she told him, "It's too soon for sex, Alfonso. I am still not feeling well." Finally, my father left her alone. A week went by, and then he began bothering my mother, again: Pulling her arm. She told him, "No, I won't! Can't you see I'm already exhausted from all of these children?"

(Our favorite line was "It's too soon for sex, Alfonso.")

Once we could stop laughing, once we could stop our exponentially wild improvisations on the theme of Translated Black English, the students pushed to explain their own negative first reactions to their spoken language on the printed page. I thought it was probably akin to the shock of seeing yourself in a photograph for the first time. Most of the students had never before seen a written facsimile of the way they talk. None of the students had ever learned how to read and write their own verbal system of communication: Black English. Alternatively, this fact began to baffle or else bemuse and then infuriate my students. Why not? Was it too late? Could they learn how to do it, now? And, ultimately, the final test question, the one testing my sincerity: Could I teach them? Because I had never taught anyone Black English and, as far as I knew, no one, anywhere in the United States, had ever offered such a course, the best I could say was "I'll try."

He looked like a wrestler.

He sat dead center in the packed room and, every time our eyes met, he quickly nodded his head as though anxious to reassure, and encourage me.

Short, with strikingly broad shoulders and long arms, he spoke with a surprisingly high, soft voice that matched the soft bright movement of his eyes. His name was Willie Jordan. He would have seemed even more unlikely in the context of Contemporary Women's Poetry, except that ten or twelve other Black men were taking the course, as well. Still, Willie was conspicuous. His extreme fitness, the muscular density of his presence underscored the riveted, gentle attention that he gave to anything anyone said. Generally, he did not join the loud and rowdy dialogue flying back and forth, but there could be no doubt about his interest in our discussions. And, when he stood to present an argument he'd prepared, overnight, that nervous smile of his vanished and an irregular stammering replaced it, as he spoke with visceral sincerity, word by word.

That was how I met Willie Jordan. It was in between "In Search of the Invisible Black Women" and "The Art of Black English." I was waiting for departmental approval and I supposed that Willie might be, so to speak, killing time until he, too, could study Black English. But Willie really did want to explore contemporary women's poetry and, to that end, volunteered for extra research and never missed a class.

Towards the end of that semester, Willie approached me for an independent study project on South Africa. It would commence the next semester. I thought Willie's writing needed the kind of improvement only intense practice will yield. I knew his intelligence was outstanding. But he'd wholeheartedly opted for "Standard English" at a rather late age, and the results were stilted and frequently polysyllabic, simply for the sake of having more syllables. Willie's unnatural formality of language seemed to me consistent with the formality of his research into South African apartheid. As he projected his studies, he would have little time, indeed, for newspapers. Instead, more than 90 percent of his research would mean saturation in strictly historical, if not archival, material. I was certainly interested. It would be tricky to guide him into a more confident and spontaneous relationship both with language and apartheid. It was going to be wonderful to see what happened when he could catch up with himself, entirely, and talk back to the world.

September, 1984: Breezy fall weather and much excitement! My class, "The Art of Black English," was full to the limit of the fire laws. And in Independent Study, Willie Jordan showed up weekly, fifteen minutes early for each of our sessions. I was pretty happy to be teaching, altogether!

I remember an early class when a young brother, replete with his ever-present porkpie hat, raised his hand and then told us that most of what he'd heard was "all right" except it was "too clean." "The brothers on the street," he continued, "they mix it up more. Like 'fuck' and 'motherfuck.' Or like 'shit.'" He waited. I waited. Then all of us laughed a good while, and we got into a brawl about "correct" and "realistic" Black English that led to Rule 1.

Rule 1: *Black English is about a whole lot more than mothafuckin.*

As a criterion, we decided, "realistic" could take you anywhere you want to go. Artful places. Angry places. Eloquent and sweettalkin places. Polemical places. Church. And the local Bar & Grill. We were checking out a language, not a mood or a scene or one guy's forgettable mouthing off.

It was hard. For most of the students, learning Black English required a fallback to patterns and rhythms of speech that many of their parents had beaten out of them. I mean *beaten*. And, in a majority of cases, correct Black English could be achieved only by striving for *incorrect* Standard English, something they were still pushing at, quite uncertainly. This state of affairs led to Rule 2.

Rule 2: *If it's wrong in Standard English it's probably right in Black English, or, at least, you're hot.*

It was hard. Roommates and family members ridiculed their studies, or remained incredulous, "You *studying* that shit? At school?" But we were beginning to feel the companionship of pioneers. And we decided that we needed another rule that would establish each one of us as equally important to our success. This was Rule 3.

**ROOMMATES AND FAMILY MEMBERS
RIDICULED THEIR STUDIES, OR
REMAINED INCREDULOUS, "YOU
STUDYING THAT SHIT? AT SCHOOL?"**

Rule 3: *If it don't sound like something that come out somebody mouth then it don't sound right. If it don't sound right then it ain't hardly right. Period.*

This rule produced two weeks of compositions in which the students agonizingly tried to spell the sound of the Black English sentence they wanted to convey. But Black English is, preeminently, an oral/spoken means of communication. *And spelling don't talk*. So we needed Rule 4.

Rule 4: *Forget about the spelling. Let the syntax carry you.*

Once we arrived at Rule 4 we started to fly, because syntax, the structure of an idea, leads you to the world view of the speaker and reveals her values. The syntax of a sentence equals the structure of your consciousness. If we insisted that the language of Black English adheres to a distinctive Black syntax, then we were postulating a profound difference between White and Black people, *per se*. Was it a difference to prize or to obliterate?

There are three qualities of Black English — the presence of life, voice, and clarity — that intensify to a distinctive Black value system that we became excited about and self-consciously tried to maintain.

1. Black English has been produced by a pre-technocratic, if not anti-technological, culture. More, our culture has been constantly threatened by annihilation or, at least, the swallowed blurring of assimilation. Therefore, our language is a system constructed by

people constantly needing to insist that we exist, that we are present. Our language devolves from a culture that abhors all abstraction, or anything tending to obscure or delete the fact of the human being who is here and now/the truth of the person who is speaking or listening. Consequently, *there is no passive voice construction possible in Black English*. For example, you cannot say, "Black English is being eliminated." You must say, instead, "White people eliminating Black English." The assumption of the presence of life governs all of Black English. Therefore, overwhelmingly, *all action takes place in the language of the present indicative*. And every sentence assumes the living and active participation of at least two human beings, the speaker and the listener.

2. A primary consequence of the person-centered values of Black English is the delivery of voice. If you speak or write Black English, your ideas will necessarily possess that otherwise elusive attribute, *voice*.
3. One main benefit following from the person-centered values of Black English is that of *clarity*. If your idea, your sentence, assumes the presence of at least two living and active people, you will make it understandable, because the motivation behind every sentence is the wish to say something real to somebody real.

As the weeks piled up, translation from Standard English into Black English or vice versa occupied a hefty part of our course work.

Standard English (hereafter S.E.): "In considering the idea of studying Black English those questioned suggested—"

(What's the subject? Where's the person? Is anybody alive in here, in that idea?)

Black English (hereafter B.E.): "I been asking people what you think about somebody studying Black English and they answer me like this:"

But there were interesting limits. You cannot "translate" instances of Standard English preoccupied with abstraction or with nothing/nobody evidently alive, into Black English. That would warp the language into uses antithetical to the guiding perspective of its community of users. Rather you must first change those Standard English sentences, themselves, into ideas consistent with the person-centered assumptions of Black English.

Guidelines for Black English

1. Minimal number of words for every idea: This is the source for the aphoristic and/or poetic force of the language; eliminate every possible word.
2. Clarity: If the sentence is not clear it's not Black English.
3. Eliminate use of the verb *to be* whenever possible. This leads to the deployment of more descriptive and, therefore, more precise verbs.

4. Use *be* or *been* only when you want to describe a chronic, ongoing state of things.
 He *be* at the office, by 9. (He is always at the office by 9.)
 He *been* with her since forever.
5. Zero copula: Always eliminate the verb *to be* whenever it would combine with another verb, in Standard English.
 S.E.: She is going out with him.
 B.E.: She going out with him.
6. Eliminate *do* as in:
 S.E.: What do you think? What do you want?
 B.E.: What you think? What you want?

Rules number 3, 4, 5, and 6 provide for the use of the minimal number of verbs per idea and, therefore, greater accuracy in the choice of verb.

7. In general, if you wish to say something really positive, try to formulate the idea using emphatic negative structure.
 S.E.: He's fabulous.
 B.E.: He bad.
8. Use double or triple negatives for dramatic emphasis.
 S.E.: Tina Turner sings out of this world.
 B.E.: Ain nobody sing like Tina.
9. Never use the *-ed* suffix to indicate the past tense of a verb.
 S.E.: She closed the door.
 B.E.: She close the door. Or, she have close the door.
10. Regardless of intentional verb time, only use the third person singular, present indicative, for use of the verb *to have*, as an auxiliary.
 S.E.: He had his wallet then he lost it.
 B.E.: He have him wallet then he lose it.
 S.E.: We had seen that movie.
 B.E.: We seen that movie. Or, we have see that movie.
11. Observe a minimal inflection of verbs. Particularly, never change from the first person singular forms to the third person singular.
 S.E.: Present Tense Forms: He goes to the store.
 B.E.: He go to the store.
 S.E.: Past Tense Forms: He went to the store.
 B.E.: He go to the store. Or, he gone to the store. Or, he been to the store.
12. The possessive case scarcely ever appears in Black English. Never use an apostrophe ('s) construction. If you wander into a possessive case component of an idea, then keep logically consistent: *ours*, *his*, *theirs*, *mines*. But, most likely, if you bump into such a component, you have wandered outside the underlying world view of Black English.
 S.E.: He will take their car tomorrow.
 B.E.: He taking they car tomorrow.
13. Plurality: Logical consistency, continued: If the modifier indicates plurality then the noun remains in the singular case.
 S.E.: He ate twelve doughnuts.

B.E.: He eat twelve doughnut.

S.E.: She has many books.

B.E.: She have many book.

14. Listen for, or invent, special Black English forms of the past tense, such as: "He losted it. That what she felted." If they are clear and readily understood, then use them.
15. Do not hesitate to play with words, sometimes inventing them: e.g. "astropotomous" means huge like a hippo plus astronomical and, therefore, signifies real big.
16. In Black English, unless you keenly want to underscore the past tense nature of an action, stay in the present tense and rely on the overall context of your ideas for the conveyance of time and sequence.
17. Never use the suffix *-ly* form of an adverb in Black English.
S.E.: The rain came down rather quickly.
B.E.: The rain come down pretty quick.
18. Never use the indefinite article *an* in Black English.
S.E.: He wanted to ride an elephant.
B.E.: He wanted to ride him a elephant.
19. Invariant syntax: in correct Black English it is possible to formulate an imperative, an interrogative, and a simple declarative idea with the same syntax:
B.E.: You going to the store?
You going to the store.

**STUDENTS HAD FORMULATED BLACK
ENGLISH GUIDELINES, BY CONSENSUS,
AND THEY WERE NOW WRITING WITH
REMARKABLE BEAUTY, PURPOSE,
AND ENJOYMENT.**

You going to the store!

Where was Willie Jordan?
We'd reached the mid-term of the semester. Students had formulated Black English guidelines, by consensus, and they were now writing with remarkable beauty, purpose, and enjoyment:

I ain hardly speakin for everybody but myself so understan that. — Kim Parks

Samples from student writings:

Janie have a great big ole hole inside her. Tea Cake the only thing that fit that hole. . . .

That pear tree beautiful to Janie, especial when bees fiddlin with the blossom in pear there growin large and lovely. But personal speakin, the love she get from starin at that tree ain the love what starin back at her in them relationship. (Monica Morris)

Love a big theme in, *They Eye Was Watching God*. Love show people new corners inside theyself. It pull out good stuff and stuff back bad stuff . . . Joe worship the doing uh his own hand and need other people to worship him too. But he ain't think about Janie that she a person and ought to live like anybody common do. Queen life not for Janie. (Monica Morris)

In both life and writin, Black womens have varietous experience of love that be cold like a iceberg or fiery like a inferno. Passion got for the other partner involve, man or women, seem as shallow, ankle-deep water or the most profoundest abyss. (Constance Evans)

Family love another bond that ain't never break under no pressure.
(Constance Evans)

You know it really cold/When the friend you/Always get out the fire/
Act like they don't know you/When you in the heat. (Constance Evans)

Big classroom discussion bout love at this time. I never take no class where us have any long arguin for and against for two or three day. New to me and great. I find the class time talkin a million time more interestin than detail bout the book. (Kathy Esseks)

As these examples suggest, Black English no longer limited the students, in any way. In fact, one of them, Philip Garfield, would shortly "translate" a pivotal scene from Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, as his final term paper:

Nora: I didn't gived no shit. I thinked you a asshole back then, too, you make it so hard for me save mines husband life.

Krogstad: Girl, it clear you ain't any idea what you done. You done exact what I once done, and I losed my reputation over it.

Nora: You asks me believe you once act brave save you wife life?

Krogstad: Law care less why you done it.

Nora: Law must suck.

Krogstad: Suck or no, if I wants, judge screw you wid dis paper.

Nora: No way, man. (Philip Garfield)

But where was Willie? Compulsively punctual, and always thoroughly prepared with neat typed compositions, he had disappeared. He failed to show up for our regularly scheduled conference, and I received neither a note nor a phone call of explanation. A whole week went by. I wondered if Willie had finally been captured by the extremely current happenings in South Africa: passage of a new constitution that did not enfranchise the Black majority, and militant Black South African reaction to that affront. I wondered if he'd been hurt, somewhere. I wondered if the serious workload of weekly readings and writings had overwhelmed him and changed his mind about independent study. Where was Willie Jordan?

One week after the first conference that Willie missed, he called: "Hello, Professor Jordan? This is Willie. I'm sorry I wasn't there last week. But something has come up and I'm pretty upset. I'm sorry but I really can't deal right now."

I asked Willie to drop by my office and just let me see that he was okay. He agreed to do that. When I saw him I knew something hideous had happened. Something had hurt him and scared him to the marrow. He was all agitated and stammering and terse and incoherent. At last, his sadly jumbled account let me surmise, as follows: Brooklyn police had

murdered his unarmed, twenty-five-year-old brother, Reggie Jordan. Neither Willie nor his elderly parents knew what to do about it. Nobody from the press was interested. His folks had no money. Police ran his family around and around, to no point. And Reggie was really dead. And Willie wanted to fight, but he felt helpless.

With Willie's permission I began to try to secure legal counsel for the Jordan family. Unfortunately, Black victims of police violence are truly numerous, while the resources available to prosecute their killers are truly scarce. A friend of mine at the Center for Constitutional Rights estimated that just the preparatory costs for bringing the cops into court normally approaches \$180,000. Unless the execution of Reggie Jordan became a major community cause for organizing and protest, his murder would simply become a statistical item.

Again, with Willie's permission, I contacted every newspaper and media person I could think of. But the Bastone feature article in *The Village Voice* was the only result from that canvassing.

Again, with Willie's permission, I presented the case to my class in Black English. We had talked about the politics of language. We had talked about love and sex and child abuse and men and women. But the murder of Reggie Jordan broke like a hurricane across the room.

There are few "issues" as endemic to Black life as police violence. Most of the students knew and respected and liked Jordan. Many of them came from the very neighborhood where the murder had occurred. All of the students had known somebody close to them who had been killed by police, or had known frightening moments of gratuitous confrontation with the cops. They wanted to do everything at once to avenge death. Number One: They decided to compose a personal statement of condolence to Willie Jordan and his family, written in Black English. Number Two: They decided to compose individual messages to the police, in Black English. These should be prefaced by an explanatory paragraph composed by the entire group. Number Three: These individual messages, with their lead paragraph, should be sent to *Newsday*.

The morning after we agreed on these objectives, one of the young women students appeared with an unidentified visitor, who sat through the class, smiling in a peculiar, comfortable way.

Now we had to make more tactical decisions. Because we wanted the messages published, and because we thought it imperative that our outrage be known by the police, the tactical question was this: Should the opening, group paragraph be written in Black English or Standard English?

I have seldom been privy to a discussion with so much heart at the dead heat of it. I will never forget the eloquence, the sudden haltings of speech, the fierce struggle against tears, the furious throwaway, and useless explosions that this question elicited.

That one question contained several others, each of them extraordinarily painful to even contemplate. How best to serve the memory of

Reggie Jordan? Should we use the language of the killer—Standard English—in order to make our ideas acceptable to those controlling the killers? But wouldn't what we had to say be rejected, summarily, if we said it in our own language, the language of the victim, Reggie Jordan? But if we sought to express ourselves by abandoning our language wouldn't that mean our suicide on top of Reggie's murder? But if we expressed ourselves in our own language wouldn't that be suicidal to the wish to communicate with those who, evidently, did not give a damn about us/Reggie/police violence in the Black community?

At the end of one of the longest, most difficult hours of my own life, the students voted, unanimously, to preface their individual messages with a paragraph composed in the language of Reggie Jordan. *"At least we don't give up nothing else. At least we stick to the truth: Be who we been. And stay all the way with Reggie."*

It was heartbreaking to proceed, from that point. Everyone in the room realized that our decision in favor of Black English had doomed our writings, even as the distinctive reality of our Black lives always has doomed our efforts to "be who we been" in this country.

I went to the blackboard and took down this paragraph dictated by the class:

YOU COPS!

WE THE BROTHER AND SISTER OF WILLIE JORDAN, A FELLOW STONY BROOK STUDENT WHO THE BROTHER OF THE DEAD REGGIE JORDAN. REGGIE, LIKE MANY BROTHER AND SISTER, HE A VICTIM OF BRUTAL RACIST POLICE, OCTOBER 25, 1984. US APPALL, FED UP, BECAUSE THAT ANOTHER SENSELESS DEATH WHAT OCCUR IN OUR COMMUNITY. THIS WHAT WE FEEL, THIS, FROM OUR HEART, FOR WE AIN'T STAYIN' SILENT NO MORE:

With the completion of this introduction, nobody said anything. I asked for comments. At this invitation, the unidentified visitor, a young Black man, ceaselessly smiling, raised his hand. He was, it so happens, a rookie cop. He had just joined the force in September and, he said, he thought he should clarify a few things. So he came forward and sprawled easily into a posture of barroom, or fireside, nostalgia:

"See," Officer Charles enlightened us, "Most times when you out on the street and something come down you do one of two things. Over-react or under-react. Now, if you under-react then you can get yourself kilt. And if you over-react then maybe you kill somebody. Fortunately it's about nine times out of ten and you will over-react. So the brother got kilt. And I'm sorry about that, believe me. But what you have to understand is what kilt him: Over-reaction. That's all. Now you talk about Black people and White police but see, now, I'm a cop myself. And (big smile) I'm Black. And just a couple months ago I was on the other side. But it's the same for me. You a cop, you the ultimate authority: the Ultimate Authority. And you on the street, most of the time you can only do one of two things:

overreact or under-react. That's all it is with the brother. Over-reaction. Didn't have nothing to do with race."

That morning Officer Charles had the good fortune to escape without being boiled alive. But barely. And I remember the pride of his smile when I read about the fate of Black policemen and other collaborators, in South Africa. I remember him, and I remember the shock and palpable feeling of shame that filled the room. It was as though that foolish, and deadly, young man had just relieved himself of his foolish, and deadly, explanation, face to face with the grief of Reggie Jordan's father and Reggie Jordan's mother. Class ended quietly. I copied the paragraph from the blackboard, collected the individual messages and left to type them up.

Newsday rejected the piece.

The Village Voice could not find room in their "Letters" section to print the individual messages from the students to the police.

None of the TV news reporters picked up the story.

Nobody raised \$180,000 to prosecute the murder of Reggie Jordan.

Reggie Jordan is really dead.

REGGIE JORDAN IS REALLY DEAD.

I asked Willie Jordan to write an essay pulling together everything important to him from that semester. He

was still deeply beside himself with frustration and amazement and loss. This is what he wrote, un-edited, and in its entirety:

"Throughout the course of this semester I have been researching the effects of oppression and exploitation along racial lines in South Africa and its neighboring countries. I have become aware of South African police brutalization of native Africans beyond the extent of the law, even though the laws themselves are catalyst affliction upon Black men, women and children. Many Africans die each year as a result of the deliberate use of police force to protect the white power structure.

Social control agents in South Africa, such as policemen, are also used to force compliance among citizens through both overt and covert tactics. It is not uncommon to find bold-faced coercion and cold-blooded killings of Blacks by South African police for undetermined and/or inadequate reasons. Perhaps the truth is that the only reasons for this heinous treatment of Blacks rests in racial differences. We should also understand that what is conveyed through the media is not always accurate and may sometimes be construed as the tip of the iceberg at best.

I recently received a painful reminder that racism, poverty, and the abuse of power are global problems which are by no means unique to South Africa. On October 25, 1984 at approximately 3:00 p.m. my brother, Mr. Reginald Jordan, was shot and killed by two New York City policemen from the 75th precinct in the East New York section of Brooklyn. His life ended at the age of twenty-five. Even up to this current point in time the Police Department has failed to provide my family, which consists of five brothers, eight sisters, and two parents, with a plausible reason for

Reggie's death. Out of the many stories that were given to my family by the Police Department, not one of them seems to hold water. In fact, I honestly believe that the Police Department's assessment of my brother's murder is nothing short of ABSOLUTE BULLSHIT, and thus far no evidence had been produced to alter perception of the situation.

Furthermore, I believe that one of three cases may have occurred in this incident. First, Reggie's death may have been the desired outcome of the police officer's action, in which case the killing was premeditated. Or, it was a case of mistaken identity, which clarifies the fact that the two officers who killed my brother and their commanding parties are all grossly incompetent. Or, both of the above cases are correct, i.e., Reggie's murderers intended to kill him and the Police Department behaved insubordinately.

Part of the argument of the officers who shot Reggie was that he had attacked one of them and took his gun. This was their major claim. They also said that only one of them had actually shot Reggie. The facts, however, speak for themselves. According to the Death Certificate and autopsy report, Reggie was shot eight times from point-blank range. The Doctor who performed the autopsy told me himself that two bullets entered the side of my brother's head, four bullets were sprayed into his back, and two bullets struck him in the back of his legs. It is obvious that unnecessary force was used by the police and that it is extremely difficult to shoot someone in his back when he is attacking or approaching you.

After experiencing a situation like this and researching South Africa I believe that to a large degree, justice may only exist as rhetoric. I find it difficult to talk of true justice when the oppression of my people both at home and abroad attests to the fact that inequality and injustice are serious problems whereby Blacks and Third World people are perpetually short-changed by society. Something has to be done about the way in which this world is set up. Although it is a difficult task, we do have the power to make a change".

—WILLIE J. JORDAN JR.

Egl 487, Section 58, November 14, 1984

It is my privilege to dedicate this book to the future life of Willie J. Jordan Jr., August 8, 1985.

NOTES

¹ Black English aphorisms crafted by Monica Morris, a Junior at S.U.N.Y., Stony Brook, October, 1984.

² *English Is Spreading But What Is English*. A presentation by Professor S. N. Sridhar, Department of Linguistics, S.U.N.Y., Stony Brook, April 9, 1985: Dean's Convocation Among the Disciplines.

³ *English Is Spreading*.

⁴ *New York Times*, March 15, 1985, Section One, p. 14: Report on Study by Linguists at the University of Pennsylvania.

⁵ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 11.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. From the use of lists to epistolary interruptions, June Jordan masterfully plays with “academic” form in this selection. Record as many traditional qualities of an academic essay as possible. Now, return to Jordan’s essay. How many ways does she disrupt this traditional form? How can you tell? How does this resistance to academic form serve her argument?
2. Recall that Jordan’s essay was published in 1985 and consider that it is still being circulated throughout the academy today. Reread Jordan’s essay, looking for moments, lines, scenes, or larger contexts that might make it seem as though her essay was written just yesterday. In what ways is her content significant in today’s academy? In today’s political climate? Why has this essay, written in response to a particular political moment, been read and written about for so long? What does it suggest to you about the essay itself, and also about our world?
3. Even today, Black English is often frowned upon in the academy, in classroom dialogue, or written text, or both. Return to Jordan’s piece, looking particularly for moments that explain the goals and structure of Black English. How could we welcome, integrate, and champion this speech in academic classrooms? In what ways can you connect the concepts of Black English, rhetorical audience, and code switching? Who might we advantage by bringing this language into the classroom? What, and who, is at risk if we continue to push Black English to the fringes?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Imagine it is your job to describe Jordan’s essay to a reader who has not read it before. Write an essay in which you consider: what is it like to read Jordan’s essay? Describe her stylistic approach. Then consider her content. What is this essay about? What are Jordan’s main questions and arguments? You’ll want to cite specific passages to illustrate the text’s connections to your claims about it. Finally, you’ll want to consider: How does the form of the essay (its style, the way it is written) connect to its content? How does Jordan enact her own arguments? In what moments and why?
2. In the second “Questions for a Second Reading,” we remind you that Jordan’s essay was published in 1985 and ask you to think about how the essay reflects realities in our world today, over thirty years later. Often when we think about history, we imagine it as a progression; we hope we are, as a nation or society, making “progress.” As you think about the relevance of Jordan’s essay to issues facing us today, what do you make of our “progress”

when it comes to race and racism? How does the date of Jordan's essay encourage, discourage, or complicate your own hopes or ideals about race? Write an essay in which you consider these questions, and make a kind of argument that might answer this broader question: how far has American culture actually come in thinking about race and racism since 1985?

3. Jordan's essay might also be read as a pedagogical argument about how teachers can make writing classrooms more deeply connected to students' lives. Reread Jordan's essay with an eye for her methodological approaches as a teacher. What are Jordan's values as a teacher, and how can you tell? How do those values seem to impact her students? Write an essay in which you consider the larger question of how some of the classrooms you have been in as a student have connected (or not connected) to your lived experience? How does Jordan help you think about your own experience? What does it mean to learn in a classroom that reflects your own lived experience? What does it seem to mean for Jordan's students? How can you tell? What does it mean, or might it mean, to learn in a classroom that doesn't connect to your experience of the world? What are the consequences of this?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. In listing the questions at the heart of whether her students should write the introduction to their remarks to *Newsday* in Black English or "Standard" English, Jordan writes:

That one question contained several others, each of them extraordinarily painful to even contemplate. How best to serve the memory of Reggie Jordan? Should we use the language of the killer — Standard English — in order to make our ideas acceptable to those controlling the killers? But wouldn't what we had to say be rejected, summarily, if we said it in our own language, the language of the victim, Reggie Jordan? But if we sought to express ourselves by abandoning our language wouldn't that mean our suicide on top of Reggie's murder? But if we expressed ourselves in our own language wouldn't that be suicidal to the wish to communicate with those who, evidently, did not give a damn about us/Reggie/police violence in the Black community? (pp. 408–09)

Often those of us in marginalized positions and occupying marginalized identity categories have discussions like this one — discussions about how to get those in more privileged positions to see or acknowledge the material consequences of oppression. Another way to think about what Jordan and her students are doing is to consider whether or not white people in power will/can/might listen to what they have to say.

This dilemma can be connected to Scaachi Koul's comment in an interview in *Room Magazine*, when Koul says

In terms of moving forward and having a more nuanced understanding of the country, in terms of race or gender, I don't know how to fix that beyond getting white people to pay attention to me and pay attention to what other people of colour say. It's not something that I can control at this point, it's a matter of white people listening to what everybody else is saying to them. If you're a white person and you live in Canada, and you're not paying attention to what Indigenous people are telling you about their lives and experiences and history, then I'm not sure how to help you, because that feels like the most basic place to start.

In this quote, Koul talks about "listening" and the urgent need for those whose identities come with privilege to listen to those who have been historically marginalized. We might further generalize this idea to say that it is an urgent matter in our world today that all of us are able to listen to those who we think are "different" from us (whoever "us" might be to your mind). For this assignment, we invite you to reread Jordan's essay with Koul's concept of listening in mind. Write an essay in which you consider: What does Koul mean in terms of the significance of listening? How does Jordan's essay demonstrate, extend, or complicate Koul's assertion of its importance? Cite passages where Jordan seems concerned about listening. You'll want to engage with the quote from Jordan we provide above, but you will also want to find others. In what ways is listening the key to the problems Jordan tries to address inside and outside the academy? How does listening play a central role in Jordan's essay, in her classroom?

2. One way to read June Jordan is to read her narrative as asking central questions or posing central arguments about race and racism in America. Consider a few of the other texts in this collection that could be read the same way, as raising the similar kinds of questions and arguments. The writers of these texts — perhaps you might think of Kwame Anthony Appiah, John Edgar Wideman, Claudia Rankine, Jennine Capó Crucet, Layli Long Soldier, Joy Castro, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Gloria Bird, Jeff Chang, W. E. B. Du Bois, or Gloria Anzaldúa — might approach the problem of racism differently or through different stylistic lenses, but they are also concerned with some of the same questions and arguments as Jordan.

Write an essay in which you point out what you believe to be several of Jordan's most pressing questions. Quote specific passages from her essay to illustrate why you believe these questions to be of importance to Jordan. Then, consider one (or several) of the other essays mentioned above. Which of these essays seems to address these most pressing questions as well? How do these other writers help you tell the story of Jordan's essay? Which passages do you think Jordan would want you to pay attention to from these other essays? How do these other passages extend, complicate, or demonstrate Jordan's central questions?

SCAACHI Koul



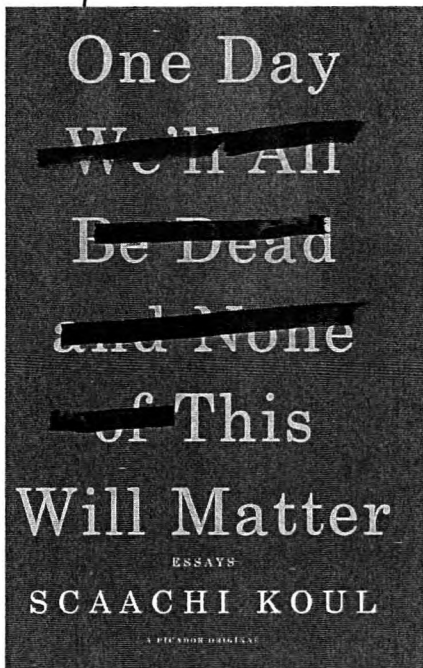
Barbara Simkova

A culture writer for BuzzFeed, Scaachi Koul's debut collection of essays, *One Day We'll All Be Dead and None of This Will Matter* (2017), uses humor and sarcasm to navigate challenging topics ranging from feminism and race, to the Internet and body hair and back again. Koul (b. 1991) was raised in Canada, although she has said that her name often made people feel that they could challenge this biographical fact. Koul writes, "Uber drivers ask me where my name is from, and then they ask me where I'm from, and then they argue with me when I tell them 'the suburbs of Canada's prairies.'" This highlights an important facet of Koul's work as a writer, which is to challenge presumptive and oppressive ideas about race and gender in the world.

The essay that follows, "Hunting Season," comes from Koul's book, and it uses personal narrative as a genre through which to examine a widespread act of normalized violence — men watching women. Koul "realized that there is this incredible culture around men watching women — and watching women to see if they're drunk enough to take home or to manipulate." She goes on to describe this issue as "so complicated to contend with because alcohol is such a big part of our social lives and such a big part of how we meet new people." Koul herself has been drugged twice at bars, something she describes as "terrifying, and . . . shockingly mundane." Koul refuses to buy into the narrative of "party culture" or of "accidental" and drunken assault. Her stories, experiences, and careful naming of these dangers alert us to the pervasive and urgent nature of the problems she articulates.

In an interview in *The Rumpus*, Koul is asked how audiences have received this essay. She responds:

Mixed. A lot of women told me it articulated a creeping discomfort they had always had with drinking near men, and a lot of men told me it was offensive and portrayed all of them as rapists. This is predictable, but I do think it's worth examining what role surveillance plays in rape culture, and what tools we use — consciously or not — to sway women towards sex. I know it's uncomfortable to read, probably more so for dudes who've never considered how the way they pick up girls at bars is a type of intentional observation, but all the more reason to think about it.



In saying the essay is “uncomfortable to read,” Koul hints at the kind of difficulty we sometimes have in mind when we select readings for this anthology. It could, perhaps, seem uncomfortable to talk about these issues in a classroom or in an essay for a course. At the same time, there might be no more important moment to do so.

Hunting Season

Recently, like on so many of my best weekends, I went out with a few friends for a couple of drinks that instead ended up turning into about ten drinks each. We had all attended an awards ceremony earlier in the evening, where I had, deservedly, lost, so we went to a nearby bar and drank warmly with each other. Baby Braga put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Heeey, paaaal," his marquee greeting for, "I am too drunk to say anything else." Jordan was there too, and let me lean on his tall frame as I teetered on heels that pinched my toes but made me feel older than I was. By two-thirty in the morning we were all drunk, and it was drunkenness that I wore on my face: I was laughing at my own jokes and my eyelids were dipping and the pincurls I had done earlier that night were starting to sag.

The boys and I stood by the bar and talked. Two men sitting near us looked over at me periodically and laughed to each other. They were talking louder than they realized, discussing how drunk I seemed, how I was clearly out of my mind. They talked about how many more drinks I might need before I could be approached, before one of them could take me home to sleep with me. They posited how many drinks I'd need to put out.

I tugged at Jordan and Braga and tried to explain what was happening, but it was clear I wasn't making any sense to them: Jordan just frowned at me, and Braga, properly imbibed himself, just groaned, "Paaaaaaaal." So instead of continuing to try to explain, I begged them not to leave me alone, not to go to the bathroom, not to go outside for a cigarette without me. We stayed together for the rest of the night, and my friend Danny escorted me right to my front door, twenty-piece chicken nugget meal tucked under my arm, fifteen sweet-and-sour sauce packets hidden in my bra.

A few weeks before that, I'd gone to dinner with another friend. We ordered a second bottle of wine for ourselves, a typical routine for us. (She once told me to start drinking rosé because it's "a literary drink," which is maybe the best excuse I've ever heard to start drinking something new.) When the bottle arrived and we let out a delighted laugh, we noticed two men seated near us lean in and say to each other: "We're in." We grimaced and drank our bottle, then a third after that.

Years before that, when I was just barely old enough to get into a bar and order a drink, a man had offered to buy me a drink. I said no, no thank you, I'd just got one. He was hitting on me, clearly, but I didn't realize that, so naturally he tensed up and got angry at me, the way any good guy would. "What are you even here for?" he said, picking up his ball and going home.

Often, people describe rape as an unfortunate accident, two drunk bodies colliding: it's more about miscommunication than intentionally ignoring a lack of consent, or actively seeking a body and mind that can't say no. But rape culture doesn't flourish by error; it's a methodical operation so ingrained in our public consciousness that we don't even notice when it's happening, and we rarely call it out even when we do see it.

Men watch women in a way we've long since normalized. It's normal for men to watch you when you enter a bar, to watch what you're drinking, what you're doing, in an attempt to get closer to you. It's normal for them to offer you a drink, and when you say no, to press a little further with are you sure, come on, have one drink with me. (When a guy asks to buy you a drink, suggest he buy you a snack instead and see how that goes over.) Men watch women at the gym, at work, on the subway: in any space occupied by men and women, the women are being watched.

The men seated next to me at the bar recently weren't trying to figure out how to talk to me. They weren't discussing what would work as a good opening line or how to impress me so I would willingly go home with one of them. They weren't even deciding whether they wanted to buy me a drink or what I actually needed, which was a burrito. They were conspiring.

Have you heard of "party culture"? It's one of many false culprits that rapists blame for their actions, as if party culture influences them to assault an unconscious or drunk woman. Brock Turner, the Stanford swimmer found guilty in 2016 of sexual assault, argued that alcohol and party culture were to blame for what he did to a drunk, unconscious woman. It somehow strips away every modicum of morality or ethics you have. It's not his fault; it's just that they were both drunk.

Turner's blaming booze is hardly the first time alcohol has been considered a bigger factor in an assault than the formulaic, intentional calculation of a rapist. In 2012, seventeen-year-old Rehtaeh Parsons, of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, killed herself after she was gang-raped while intoxicated and the photos of the assault were circulated online. That same year, in Steubenville, Ohio, a high school girl was raped by her classmates while she was drunk, then photographed. In 2013, Vanderbilt University football players were accused of raping an unconscious twenty-one-year-old student in a dorm.

**WHAT A COINCIDENCE THAT
RAPISTS SO FREQUENTLY SEEM TO
FIND WOMEN WHO ARE DRUNK.**

What a coincidence that rapists so frequently seem to find women who are drunk.

We know being drunk doesn't mean you deserve to be assaulted, and we know that there are plenty of men who can drink without raping someone. When we think of rape, we tend to think of coordinated calculation: Men who drive around in unmarked vans with duct tape and chloroform in the back. Men who follow women around, tracking their daily moves, catching them at their most vulnerable. We think of rape in terms of how

men create intricate plans for hurting women, for sexual violence at its most gruesome, men who use physical force to hold women down. But we don't, for some reason, associate it with a man who surveils you in public, maybe for an hour or two, to see if you're getting drunk on your own or if he needs to help you along by buying you a drink. These types of rapes—rapes where women are too drunk to consent, or unconscious, or when no one bothers to ask for consent in the first place—are considered accidents. Everyone was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Youthful indiscretion. Party culture. It's the wine's fault. We forget that there's calculation, that he walked up to you because you were teetering and he thought it would be easy.

Pickup-artist culture is most obviously dedicated to monitoring women, to tracking their moves and how the little ways we let our guard down may benefit a man. Roosh V, a pickup artist perhaps best known for saying rape should be legal, gives tips on his site for which girls you should pick up at a bar: "I look for girls who are drinking . . . It's possible to have a one-night stand with a sober girl, but a few drinks in her makes it easier."

But we see it in far less insidious places too, normalized in what we consume as entertainment. On the U.S. version of *The Office*, Michael Scott spent much of the first few episodes sexually harassing his boss, Jan, ignoring her when she said no and following her around. After a night of drinking, they slept together, but she still rejected him the next day. He continued to harass her at work and monitor her actions to see if something suggested she didn't mean it when she said no. *How I Met Your Mother's* Barney Stinson had pickup techniques that, if displayed in the real world, would get him arrested. Plenty of *Mad Men* episodes were about getting women drunk in order to take them home.

Surveillance feeds into rape culture more than drinking ever could. It's the part of male entitlement that makes them believe they're owed something if they pay enough attention to you, mon-

**SURVEILLANCE FEEDS INTO RAPE
CULTURE MORE THAN DRINKING
EVER COULD.**

itor how you're behaving to see if you seem loose and friendly enough to accommodate a conversation with a man you've never met. He's not a rapist. No, he's just offering to buy you a beer, and a shot, and a beer, and another beer, he just wants you to have a really good time. He wants you to lose the language of being able to consent. He's drunk too, but of course, you're not watching him like he's watching you.

The first time I was roofied, I was barely eighteen, and as I walked home from one bar I was swept into another by a man who promised me a glass of water and a comfortable seat. "I'll get you some water and then you'll be able to get home okay," he told me. I said okay because I didn't have the language for, "No, please get me a cab." He was nice to me and he had a soft, French accent and he was cute. (I think he was cute. I just remember a vague brunette blob holding my hand and guiding me to a table.)

He put a glass in front of me and I drank greedily, until my brain got foggier and my limbs felt weak. He sat next to me for most of the night, he watched me tip the glass to my mouth, he waited for my words to become more and more indistinct. He turned his back for a second and I stole away to the bathroom because I knew something was wrong with my body, knew that my brain couldn't send a message to my legs to stop shaking or my heart to beat slower. It was a distress signal I had heard about from other women who always told me to be careful with my drinks, to cover them up, to drink out of bottles if possible, to avoid a drink that might be fizzing unnecessarily. It was the first time, and yet, familiar: I caught a glimpse of myself in the bathroom mirror—hair matted, forehead beaded with sweat, lips dry and cracked—before my legs locked and I collapsed.

Outside the door, a woman heard me fall, and she came in and picked me up. She asked me what my name was and where I lived and I don't remember telling her anything. She carried me out front, through a snowbank, and into a cab. The guy who had spent the night with me, who was running around the bar trying to find me, rushed up before she could close the door. "Wait," he said, "she's with me. I'll take her home."

The woman turned to him, blocking me from his view. "Okay," she said. "What's her name?"

My name is difficult enough for the sober, for people I have known for years, never mind a stranger at a bar, someone who I do not think ever asked me what my name was. He backed off immediately, and the woman handed my cab driver some money and put my seatbelt on for me. "Take her straight home and make sure she gets inside," she said. "And if you don't, I will find out, because I'm a lawyer." I woke up the next morning on my kitchen floor in my penguin pyjama bottoms.

The second time, a bartender drugged both me and my (male) friend. Our best theory is that he was trying to get to me, and that was easier if my friend was out of commission. We were both dizzy and hysterical and confused after two drinks apiece. I walked him to the subway at midnight and remember nothing else, except that he lost his phone and we were both sick for days. I laughed it off—"I've done this before," I told him—but he was so rattled he didn't ask to see me for months.

Both times, I knew I was being watched. The first time, I was being watched when I stumbled down a street by myself, and so I got pulled into

**MY DRUNKENNESS WAS MONITORED,
BECAUSE THE DRUNKER I GOT, THE
LESS RESISTANCE I COULD OFFER.**

a bar I didn't want to go into. I was watched while I drank, watched while I struggled to give answers. My drunkenness was monitored, because the drunker I got, the less resistance I could offer. Saying no is a clear full stop, but if I can't really speak at

all, if my words are running together and I'm closer to sleep than struggle, then it's somehow okay to take me home.

The second time, I was being watched by a bartender who spent too much time hovering over our drinks, who filled them up from an area behind the bar I couldn't see. Who knew I had to be wary of the guy

whose job it was to give me a drink and, preferably, not poison me? If you can't trust your bartender, you can't trust anyone.

And yet, being surveilled with the intention of assault or rape is practically mundane, it happens so often. It's such an ingrained part of the female experience that it doesn't register as unusual. The danger of it, then, is in its routine, in how normalized it is for a woman to feel monitored, so much so that she might not know she's in trouble until that invisible line is crossed from "typical patriarchy" to "you should run."

So now, when I drink, I'm far more cautious. I don't like ordering draft beers from taps hidden from view. I don't like pouring bottles into pint glasses. I don't leave my drink with strangers, I don't let people I don't know order drinks for me without watching them do it, and I don't drink excessively with people I don't think I can trust with my sleepy body. I don't turn my back on a cocktail, not just because I like drinking but because I can't trust what happens to it when I'm not looking. The intersection of rape culture and surveillance culture means that being a guarded drinker is not only my responsibility, it is my *sole* responsibility. Any lapse in judgment could not only result in clear and present danger, but also set me up for a chorus of "Well, she should've known better."

The mistake we make is in thinking rape isn't premeditated, that it happens by accident somehow, that you're drunk and you run into a girl who's also drunk and half-asleep on a bench and you sidle up to her and things get out of hand and before you know it, you're being accused of something you'd never do. But men who rape are men who watch for the signs of who they believe they can rape. Rape culture isn't a natural occurrence; it thrives thanks to the dedicated attention given to women in order to take away their security. Rapists exist on a spectrum, and maybe this attentive version is the most dangerous type: women are so used to being watched that we don't notice when someone's watching us for the worst reason imaginable. They have a plan long before we even get to the bar to order our first drink.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Scaachi Koul spends the majority of "Hunting Season" relaying personal narratives. She tells her audience about the first and second times she was roofied, her desperate attempts to make sure her male friends, Jordan and Braga, do not abandon her at the bar, and describes the woman lawyer who put her into a taxi after one of the men that drugged Koul tries to take her home. Reread this essay, making note of the perspectives Koul employs throughout. Where does she shift from the use of first person to second? Where does she invite readers into this piece with "we"? How do these moves change the tone and intention of the essay?
2. Although Koul's title is bold and clear, she does not explicitly run with the "hunting" metaphor in her work. At no point does she describe women and

girls as “deer” or “prey.” She is subtler than this. Reread this essay, doing the sometimes difficult work of uncovering her metaphor. In what places does she hint at elements we might associate with hunting practices of watching, of surveillance? Can you think of other kinds of people with the power to be surveyors? Can you think of other kinds of people who are watched? Why do you think Koul makes readers work for this metaphor? What do you gain as you uncover its implications?

3. This essay is brief and, at moments, biting. Despite its brevity, however, Koul takes two distinct “breaks” in this piece, once after “They weren’t even deciding whether they wanted to buy me a drink or what I actually needed, which was a burrito. They were conspiring,” and another time following, “He’s drunk, too, but of course, you’re not watching him like he’s watching you.” Why do you think Koul made the rhetorical choice to build literal space into this essay? What are the functions of these breaks? Read around the breaks. Why did she choose to offer readers pause points in these precise places? What other rhetorical moves might Koul have made here to accomplish this same purpose?
4. The language Koul uses throughout this piece is casual, informal, and conversational. Sometimes Koul manages to be funny, even as she is discussing violence perpetrated against herself, and many women, more broadly. How do you see levity and humor functioning in this piece? How might this essay have been received if it was rooted in facts and statistics as opposed to personal narrative and experience? What does Koul risk or gain by wrapping dark and difficult content in light language?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. One could argue that the title of this piece, “Hunting Season,” does a lot of the heavy lifting in conveying its meaning. Write an essay in which you consider the significance of Koul’s title. What kind of title is it? What was the title’s impact *before* you had read the essay, and now after? How does the title function in the essay? How might the essay change if its title were something else, something more direct or summative? What power does the metaphor of “hunting” provide? And why do you think Koul chooses hunting as the frame for the essay? Finally, once you’ve considered Koul’s title, think about the titles of the essays you have written so far in your writing life. What have your titles been like? Have you found it difficult to pick titles? Why or why not? How might thinking about Koul’s title help you think about your own? Of course, you will want to think innovatively and carefully about the title of this essay you are writing.
2. For this assignment, we invite you to think about “rape culture”—what it means and how it functions in society as you understand it. You should begin with Koul’s essay: how does she understand rape culture? You might then move to the Internet to do some of your own reading. How is the term

used in media and news? Write an essay in which you detail for your readers a thorough understanding of “rape culture” by turning to Koul’s essay, in addition to other sources.

Your essay should reflect your intellectual and political understanding of the term, but you should also consider your own perspectives. Where do you see demonstrations of rape culture in your own consumption of popular media or in your own experiences of the world? What do you think can be done to convince skeptics that rape culture exists and that there are things they should do about it? Why do you think, for Koul, surveillance and watching are such key terms in understanding how rape culture functions?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Both Scaachi Koul and Aubrey Hirsch (p. 387) confront the issue of rape culture in different ways. Reread both essays, noting for yourself the moments where each writer attempts to define and describe rape culture in America. Write an essay in which you discuss both writers’ approach to the subject. In what ways do they appear to approach the subject differently? One way to think about that question is to think about what you might describe as each writer’s method or way of seeing. In what ways do the forms and styles of their work seem to differ or align?

In this essay, we are not asking you to draw any conclusions about which essay *is* better or which one you like better. We are inviting you to think about each writers’ choices in their writing. You’ll want to cite specific passages from the readings to illustrate which moments you think demonstrate the approaches you describe. And finally, you’ll want to discuss how these approaches might help Koul and Hirsch write about a very difficult subject.

2. Perhaps “Hunting Season” can be likened to Michel Foucault’s theory of “Panopticism” (p. 291) in terms of both essays’ foci on surveillance. Though these writers demonstrate their ideas very differently, both Koul and Foucault might be said to be offering theories of surveillance that invite us to think about the insidious and regulatory functions of “watching” in our culture. Write an essay in which you attempt to incorporate each writer’s theory of surveillance into the other’s. What light might Foucault shed on “Hunting Season”? How might Koul complicate or extend Foucault’s theories? These two writers are linked conceptually but writing at different moments in time. How might you account for the presences and absences in each of their essays? What can we learn from reading these pieces alongside one another?
3. In an interview in *Room Magazine*, Koul says:

In terms of moving forward and having a more nuanced understanding of the country, in terms of race or gender, I don’t how to fix that beyond getting white people to pay attention to me and pay attention

to what other people of colour say. It's not something that I can control at this point, it's a matter of white people listening to what everybody else is saying to them. If you're a white person and you live in Canada, and you're not paying attention to what Indigenous people are telling you about their lives and experiences and history, then I'm not sure how to help you, because that feels like the most basic place to start.

In these remarks, Koul offers us a fruitful way to think about identity and about reading itself. Koul talks about "listening" and the urgent need for those whose identities come with privilege to listen to those who have been historically marginalized. We might further generalize this idea to say that it is an urgent matter in our world today that all of us are able to listen to those who we think are "different" from us (whoever "us" might be to your mind). For this assignment, we invite you to do some research on the writers in this anthology — either by reading the headnotes or by doing your own research at the library and/or the Internet. Choose a writer who seems "different" from you in some way. Read their essay in the collection carefully. Keep Koul's quote about listening in your mind as you read. Write an essay in which you consider: What does Koul mean in terms of the significance of listening? What do you notice about yourself as a listener? At what moments in the text you have chosen, written by someone who is "different" from you in some way, do you find yourself listening best, or not listening well? Why? What qualities does one need to possess or moves does a reader need to make to be a "good" listener? What can we learn from listening?

4. As we note in the "Introduction," many of the essays in this collection take on difficult subject matter that can be hard to read about, confront, or even articulate to begin with. One might even say that every essay in this reader is "difficult" in some way, in its subject matter, theoretical approach, language, form. Difficulty is not merely a matter of dense language or accessibility in a piece of writing. Difficulty is also the condition of a writer's challenge: to represent through language what seems difficult to articulate or represent. Another way to think of this is to think about the ways our culture encourages us *not* to think about difficult subjects — or even to simplify them rather than represent them in their complexity.

As you reread Koul, note your own reading responses. At what moments was the essay "difficult" to read? What do you think made it difficult to read? We invite you to consider features of the text itself *and* characteristics of your own dispositions as a reader and human being that might make certain moments more or less difficult to read.

Then, consider another essay or two in this collection that has given you difficulty. Write an essay in which you consider the question: what makes a text difficult to read? You can explore this question as one of subject matter, density, or form. Or all of those. This is a moment for you to define: What do you mean by difficulty? How have you experienced difficulty as a reader? And what can you learn from your own experiences of difficulty?

If you have written about this question before, how has reading Koul's essay changed or complicated your concept of difficulty?

LAYLI
Long
Soldier



Chris Felver/Premium Archive/Getty Images

A writer, poet, and educator with a BFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts and an MFA from Bard College, Layli Long Soldier has been awarded a National Artist Fellowship from the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (2015), a Lannan Literary Fellowship for Poetry (2015), and a Whiting Writer's Award (2016), among other honors. She has produced both a chapbook, *Chromosomory* (2010), and full-length collection of poetry, *Whereas* (2017), which won the National Books Critics Circle award, was a finalist for the National Book Award, and is excerpted here.

Long Soldier's book, *Whereas*, is a formally inventive response to the congressional resolution of "Apology to Native Peoples," which is a part of the 2010 Department of Defense Appropriations Act. The writing of Long Soldier, a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, pulls her identity as a Native American woman from the shadow of history and into the light of present and future tense. Of this poetry collection, she says, "I really wanted it to be grounded in the now, at least within my own lifetime. And I wanted as much as possible to avoid this sort of nostalgic portraiture of a Native life, my life." In the poem "38," reproduced here, Long Soldier details a lesser known violence committed against thirty-eight Dakota men "executed by hanging, under orders from President Abraham Lincoln." By the poem's conclusion, the act has grown like ivy from a neglected moment in history into a mass murder with unforgivable, deeply rooted ramifications, both for Long Soldier individually and Native Americans more broadly.

Long Soldier teaches English at Diné College of the Navajo people in the Four Corners Region of Arizona where she spent much of her childhood. She writes in her poem "Whereas I Did Not Desire in Childhood":

I did not desire in childhood to be a part of this but desired most of all to be a part. A piece combined with others to make up a whole. Some but not all of something. In Lakota, it's hanké, a piece or part of anything. Like the creek trickling behind my aunt's house where Uncle built her a bridge to cross from bank to bank, not far from a

There was a movie titled *Lincoln* about the presidency of Abraham Lincoln.

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was included in the film *Lincoln*; the hanging of the Dakota 38 was not.

In any case, you might be asking, "Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hung?"

As a side note, the past tense of hang is *hung*, but when referring to the capital punishment of hanging, the correct past tense is *hanged*.

So it's possible that you're asking, "Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hanged?"

They were hanged for the Sioux Uprising.

I want to tell you about the Sioux Uprising, but I don't know where to begin.

I may jump around and details will not unfold in chronological order.

Keep in mind, I am not a historian.

So I will recount facts as best as I can, given limited resources and understanding.

Before Minnesota was a state, the Minnesota region, generally speaking, was the traditional homeland for Dakota, Anishinaabeg, and Ho-Chunk people.

During the 1800s, when the US expanded territory, they "purchased" land from the Dakota people as well as the other tribes.

But another way to understand that sort of "purchase" is: Dakota leaders ceded land to the US government in exchange for money or goods, but most importantly, the safety of their people.

Some say that Dakota leaders did not understand the terms they were entering, or they never would have agreed.

Even others call the entire negotiation "trickery."

But to make whatever-it-was official and binding, the US government drew up an initial treaty.

This treaty was later replaced by another (more convenient) treaty, and then another.

I've had difficulty unraveling the terms of these treaties, given the legal speak and congressional language.

As treaties were abrogated (broken) and new treaties were drafted, one after another, the new treaties often referenced old defunct treaties, and it is a muddy, switchback trail to follow.

Although I often feel lost on this trail, I know I am not alone.

However, as best as I can put the facts together, in 1851, Dakota territory was contained to a twelve-mile by one-hundred-fifty-mile long strip along the Minnesota River.

But just seven years later, in 1858, the northern portion was ceded (taken) and the southern portion was (conveniently) allotted, which reduced Dakota land to a stark ten-mile tract.

These amended and broken treaties are often referred to as the Minnesota Treaties.

The word *Minnesota* comes from *mni*, which means water; and *sota*, which means turbid.

Synonyms for turbid include muddy, unclear, cloudy, confused, and smoky.

Everything is in the language we use.

For example, a treaty is, essentially, a contract between two sovereign nations.

The US treaties with the Dakota Nation were legal contracts that promised money.

It could be said, this money was payment for the land the Dakota ceded; for living within assigned boundaries (a reservation); and for relinquishing rights to their vast hunting territory which, in turn, made Dakota people dependent on other means to survive: money.

The previous sentence is circular, akin to so many aspects of history.

As you may have guessed by now, the money promised in the turbid treaties did not make it into the hands of Dakota people.

In addition, local government traders would not offer credit to "Indians" to purchase food or goods.

Without money, store credit, or rights to hunt beyond their ten-mile tract of land, Dakota people began to starve.

The Dakota people were starving.

The Dakota people starved.

In the preceding sentence, the word “starved” does not need italics for emphasis.

One should read “The Dakota people starved” as a straightforward and plainly stated fact.

As a result — and without other options but to continue to starve — Dakota people retaliated.

Dakota warriors organized, struck out, and killed settlers and traders.

This revolt is called the Sioux Uprising.

Eventually, the US Cavalry came to Mnisota to confront the Uprising.

More than one thousand Dakota people were sent to prison.

As already mentioned, thirty-eight Dakota men were subsequently hanged.

After the hanging, those one thousand Dakota prisoners were released.

However, as further consequence, what remained of Dakota territory in Mnisota was dissolved (stolen).

The Dakota people had no land to return to.

This means they were exiled.

Homeless, the Dakota people of Mnisota were relocated (forced) onto reservations in South Dakota and Nebraska.

Now, every year, a group called the Dakota 38 + 2 Riders conduct a memorial horse ride from Lower Brule, South Dakota, to Mankato, Mnisota.

The Memorial Riders travel 325 miles on horseback for eighteen days, sometimes through sub-zero blizzards.

They conclude their journey on December 26, the day of the hanging.

Memorials help focus our memory on particular people or events.

Often, memorials come in the forms of plaques, statues, or gravestones.

The memorial for the Dakota 38 is not an object inscribed with words, but an *act*.

Yet, I started this piece because I was interested in writing about grasses.

So, there is one other event to include, although it's not in chronological order and we must backtrack a little.

When the Dakota people were starving, as you may remember, government traders would not extend store credit to "Indians."

One trader named Andrew Myrick is famous for his refusal to provide credit to Dakota people by saying, "If they are hungry, let them eat grass."

There are variations of Myrick's words, but they are all something to that effect.

When settlers and traders were killed during the Sioux Uprising, one of the first to be executed by the Dakota was Andrew Myrick.

When Myrick's body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass.

I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem.

There's irony in their poem.

There was no text.

"Real" poems do not "really" require words.

I have italicized the previous sentence to indicate inner dialogue, a revealing moment.

But, on second thought, the words "Let them eat grass" click the gears of the poem into place.

So, we could also say, language and word choice are crucial to the poem's work.

Things are circling back again.

Sometimes, when in a circle, if I wish to exit, I must leap.

And let the body swing.

From the platform.

Out

to the grasses.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. In “38,” we see Long Soldier pulling back the curtain on her writing process in the product of her work as she vacillates between calling this piece of writing a both poem and also not a poem. Return to this piece, searching particularly for the word “poem” and noting the ways she writes around the word. What conclusion does Long Soldier come to about the genre of her writing? Do you reach the same conclusion? What, would you argue, makes this passage a poem? What, would you argue, makes this passage *not* a poem?
2. Long Soldier writes, “You may or may not have heard about the Dakota 38.” How much do you know about the Dakota War of 1862, and the conditions under which thirty-eight Dakota men were executed? Do some research on the subject in the library and/or online. What did you find out that you might not have known before? What did you already know? How do you understand your level of knowledge about this event? What might be factors that affect your level of knowledge about this even prior to reading this poem? What are the differences in the ways Long Soldier talks about this historical event and how other sources discuss or represent it? What is noteworthy to you about those differences?
3. Return to the text, looking for Long Soldier’s carefully timed moments of repetition. Circle images, symbols, words, phrases, and ideas that seem to show up over and over again. As a reader, how does this repetition affect the poem, your experience as a reader, and your understanding of Long Soldier’s aims in the poem?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Long Soldier’s “38” is about a disturbing historical event. Long Soldier’s poem is also, in many ways, about language itself—how we use it, how it shapes and reflects our understanding of the world. She even comments, repeatedly, about how she herself is using language or understanding the use of language in her own poem. For example, in the opening lines Long Soldier comments on “sentences” as a way of calling our attention to both what she is doing and to the language conventions of the sentence. Reread Long Soldier’s poem looking for moments you would characterize as focused on language, both how we use it, and how it shapes and reflects our understandings.

Write an essay in which you consider Long Soldier’s attention to and focus on language—her assertion that “Everything is in the language we use.” If you were to understand her poem as a kind of theory about language, what would you name that theory? How would you describe her arguments and ideas about language? And why do you think language is such a major part of her work as she considers the Dakota 38? How does an understanding

of or a focus on particular language help us to understand this history? Why is it important which words we use to talk about which things? What do you suppose Long Soldier hopes we will come to see about how language plays (and continues to play) a role in oppression and violence?

2. Long Soldier provides her reader with some space between lines. She gives us time to sit with each sentences — sometimes even one word (as is the case in the ending of the poem). Reread “38” out loud, making sure to pause in each moment that Long Soldier provides space for you to do so. As you read, make note of the lines that seem most important to you. When you’ve finished rereading aloud, choose *two* of the lines you believe to be the most significant to the poem and to you.

Write an essay in which you make the case for these two lines as the most essential lines of the piece. This is a difficult task; poets pay particular attention to each line, each word of what they write, so you have a challenging path ahead as you write this essay. Why did you choose these particular lines? How do they contain the most important words/ideas/images of the poem for you? In what ways do these lines reflect Long Soldier’s central arguments or analyses? And in what ways are these two lines a reflection of you as a reader. Why would you pay particular attention to those lines or why they would stand out to a reader like you, whatever you believe that to mean?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. In the first “Questions for a Second Reading,” we call your attention to the ways that Long Soldier comments in the poem itself on whether her work is, indeed, a poem. There are other moments like this in the piece where Long Soldier calls attention to herself as a writer who makes decisions about the act of writing itself. It’s a kind of “meta” move whereby a writer explicitly comments on the decisions, challenges, and moves they are making *as they are making them*. In “Our Time” (p. 603), John Edgar Wideman employs a similar tactic, stepping out of his essay about his brother to talk about how he struggled, as a brother and a writer, to write the piece.

Consider the ways each of these writers exposes themselves as the writer of their pieces as they are writing. Write an essay in which you discuss this writerly decision. You might begin with several passages from each essay that reveal a moment of metacommentary on the process of writing. Discuss these passages and what their impact is on you as a reader. Once you have a sense of how and when each of these writers makes these moves, we invite you to explore several questions: In reading these pieces side by side, why does it seem each of these writers chooses to provide this kind of commentary? What about their content might encourage them to do so? How do you think each writer is hoping their readers will respond? Why didn’t they remove the moments of revision, doubt, or “inner dialogue” (as Long Soldier calls it)? What can you, as a writer, learn from this insistence on exposing their process?

2. Long Soldier writes, "The previous sentence is circular, akin to so many aspects of history." This idea is something that Susan Griffin, in "Our Secret" (p. 351), also lingers on. Griffin has her own understanding of and commentary on history — for example when she writes, "To a certain kind of mind, what is hidden away ceases to exist" (p. 374). Reread both writers' work, noting and highlighting the moments they seem to be making broader claims about history — about the ways we think and talk about history, about how history is understood and framed, or about what histories mean.

Write an essay in which you consider Griffin's ideas about history alongside Long Soldier's. What does each writer appear to be saying about history? Cite specific passages, unpacking in each of them the conceptions of history that are being invoked. How do Griffin and Long Soldier complicate common ideas about history? What can each writer help us see? If you consider the ways in which these two writers conceptualize history itself, how do those conceptualizations ask us to understand our present moment's relationship to the past?

3. As we suggest in the first "Assignments for Writing," Long Soldier's poem can be understood to be about language itself — how we use it and how it shapes and reflects our understanding of the world. One might also argue that this particular focus on language is something common to many poets. For example, Claudia Rankine (p. 499), another poet included in this anthology, is also asking us to think carefully about language. Reread Long Soldier's and Rankine's writing, looking particularly for moments you would characterize as focused on language (how we and others use it, and how it shapes/reflects our understandings).

Write an essay in which you consider both poets' attention to and focus on language. You might revisit Long Soldier's assertion that "Everything is in the language we use" and connect that claim to work you see Rankine doing in chronicling some of her interactions, particularly with white people. How does an understanding of or a focus on particular language help us understand the history of racism in the United States? Why is it important which words we use to talk about which things? What do you suppose each writer hopes we will see about how language plays (and continues to play) a role in oppression and violence? Cite specific passages from both Rankine and Long Soldier to illuminate how each writer positions language (what is said, how it is said, what it means) as crucial to understanding history, writing, and the world.

4. Both Gloria Bird's "Autobiography as Spectacle: An Act of Liberation or the Illusion of Liberation" (p. 168) and Layli Long Soldier's "38," invite readers to think carefully and meaningfully about histories and representations of Native Americans. While their writings address these subjects in different ways, it is a worthwhile task to put the two writers in conversation with one another. How might Bird, for example, respond to Long Soldier's poem? How are each writer's goals (as you understand them from their writing) made visible to readers, and how are those goals in conversation with one another? Would Bird consider Long Soldier's poem an act of autobiography? Why or why not? Where do you see possibilities for dynamic interaction between these two pieces of writing in terms of the content, the form, and the complexity of their ideas in and the intentions of their writing?

WALKER Percy



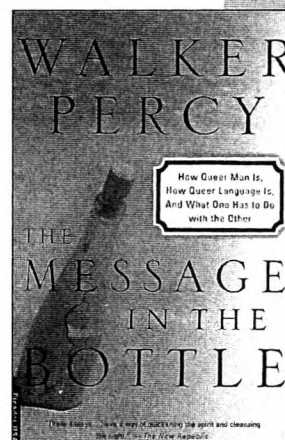
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In his midforties, after a life of relative obscurity as, he said, a “failed physician,” Walker Percy wrote his first novel, *The Moviegoer*. It won the National Book Award for fiction in 1962, and Percy emerged as one of this country’s leading novelists. Little in his background would have predicted such a career.

After graduating from Columbia University’s medical school in 1941, Percy (1916–1990) worked at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. He soon contracted tuberculosis from performing autopsies and was sent to a sanatorium to recover, where, as he said, “I was in bed so much, alone so much, that I had nothing to do but read and think. I began to question everything I had once believed.” He returned to medicine briefly but suffered a relapse and during his long recovery began “to make reading a full-time occupation.” He left medicine, but not until 1954, almost a decade later, did he publish his first essay, “Symbol as Need.”

The essays that followed, including “The Loss of the Creature,” all dealt with the relationships between language and understanding or belief. In the later essays, Percy seemed to turn away from academic forms of argument and to depend more and more on stories or anecdotes from daily life—to write, in fact, as a storyteller and to be wary of abstraction or explanation. Robert Coles has said that Percy’s failure to find a form that would reach a larger audience may have led him to try his hand at a novel. You will notice in the essay that follows that Percy delights in piling example upon example; he never seems to settle down to a topic sentence, or any sentence for that matter, that sums everything up and makes the examples superfluous.

In addition to *The Moviegoer*, Percy wrote five other novels, including *Lancelot* (1977) and *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987). He published two books of essays, *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other* (1975, from which “The Loss of the Creature” is taken) and *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (1983). Percy died at his home in Covington, Louisiana, on May 10, 1990, leaving a considerable amount of unpublished work, some of which was gathered into a posthumous collection, *Signposts in a Strange Land* (1991). *The Correspondence of Shelby Foote and Walker Percy* was published in 1996.



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The Loss of the Creature

I

Every explorer names his island Formosa, beautiful. To him it is beautiful because, being first, he has access to it and can see it for what it is. But to no one else is it ever as beautiful — except the rare man who manages to recover it, who knows that it has to be recovered.

Garcia López de Cárdenas discovered the Grand Canyon and was amazed at the sight. It can be imagined: One crosses miles of desert, breaks through the mesquite, and there it is at one's feet. Later the government set the place aside as a national park, hoping to pass along to millions the experience of Cárdenas. Does not one see the same sight from the Bright Angel Lodge that Cárdenas saw?

The assumption is that the Grand Canyon is a remarkably interesting and beautiful place and that if it had a certain value P for Cárdenas,

the same value P may be transmitted to any number of sightseers — just as Banting's discovery of insulin can be transmitted to any number of diabetics. A counterinfluence is at work, however, and it would be nearer the truth to say that if the place is seen by a million sightseers, a single sightseer does not receive value P but a millionth part of value P .

It is assumed that since the Grand Canyon has the fixed interest value P , tours can be organized for any number of people.

A man in Boston decides to spend his vaca-

tion at the Grand Canyon. He visits his travel bureau, looks at the folder, signs up for a two-week tour. He and his family take the tour, see the Grand Canyon, and return to Boston. May we say that this man has seen the Grand Canyon? Possibly he has. But it is more likely that what he has done is the one sure way not to see the canyon.

Why is it almost impossible to gaze directly at the Grand Canyon under these circumstances and see it for what it is — as one picks up a strange object from one's back yard and gazes directly at it? It is almost impossible because the Grand Canyon, the thing as it is, has been appropriated by the symbolic complex which has already been formed in the sightseer's mind. Seeing the canyon under approved circumstances is seeing the symbolic complex head on. The thing is no longer the thing as it confronted the Spaniard; it is rather that which has already been

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formulated — by picture postcard, geography book, tourist folders, and the words *Grand Canyon*. As a result of this preformulation, the source of the sightseer's pleasure undergoes a shift. Where the wonder and delight of the Spaniard arose from his penetration of the thing itself, from a progressive discovery of depths, patterns, colors, shadows, etc., now the sightseer measures his satisfaction *by the degree to which the canyon conforms to the preformed complex*. If it does so, if it looks just like the postcard, he is pleased; he might even say, "Why it is every bit as beautiful as a picture postcard!" He feels he has not been cheated. But if it does not conform, if the colors are somber, he will not be able to see it directly; he will only be conscious of the disparity between what it is and what it is supposed to be. He will say later that he was unlucky in not being there at the right time. The highest point, the term of the sightseer's satisfaction, is not the sovereign discovery of the thing before him; it is rather the measuring up of the thing to the criterion of the preformed symbolic complex.

Seeing the canyon is made even more difficult by what the sightseer does when the moment arrives, when sovereign knower confronts the thing to be known. Instead of looking at it, he photographs it. There is no confrontation at all. At the end of forty years of preformulation and with the Grand Canyon yawning at his feet, what does he do? He waives his right of seeing and knowing and records symbols for the next forty years. For him there is no present; there is only the past of what has been formulated and seen and the future of what has been formulated and not seen. The present is surrendered to the past and the future.

The sightseer may be aware that something is wrong. He may simply be bored; or he may be conscious of the difficulty: that the great thing yawning at his feet somehow eludes him. The harder he looks at it, the less he can see. It eludes everybody. The tourist cannot see it; the bellboy at the Bright Angel Lodge cannot see it: for him it is only one side of the space he lives in, like one wall of a room; to the ranger it is a tissue of everyday signs relevant to his own prospects — the blue haze down there means that he will probably get rained on during the donkey ride.

How can the sightseer recover the Grand Canyon? He can recover it in any number of ways, all sharing in common the stratagem of avoiding the approved confrontation of the tour and the Park Service.

It may be recovered by leaving the beaten track. The tourist leaves the tour, camps in the back country. He arises before dawn and approaches the South Rim through a wild terrain where there are no trails and no railed-in lookout points. In other words, he sees the canyon by avoiding all the facilities for seeing the canyon. If the benevolent Park Service hears about this fellow and thinks he has a good idea and places the following notice in the Bright Angel Lodge: *Consult ranger for information on getting off the beaten track* — the end result will only be the closing of another access to the canyon.

It may be recovered by a dialectical movement which brings one back to the beaten track but at a level above it. For example, after a lifetime of avoiding the beaten track and guided tours, a man may deliberately seek out the most beaten track of all, the most commonplace tour

imaginable: he may visit the canyon by a Greyhound tour in the company of a party from Terre Haute — just as a man who has lived in New York all his life may visit the Statue of Liberty. (Such dialectical savorings of the familiar as the familiar are, of course, a favorite stratagem of *The New Yorker* magazine.) The thing is recovered from familiarity by means of an exercise in familiarity. Our complex friend stands behind his fellow tourists at the Bright Angel Lodge and sees the canyon through them and their predicament, their picture taking and busy disregard. In a sense, he exploits his fellow tourists; he stands on their shoulders to see the canyon.

Such a man is far more advanced in the dialectic than the sightseer who is trying to get off the beaten track — getting up at dawn and approaching the canyon through the mesquite. This stratagem is, in fact, for our complex man the weariest, most beaten track of all.

It may be recovered as a consequence of a breakdown of the symbolic machinery by which the experts present the experience to the consumer. A family visits the canyon in the usual way. But shortly after their arrival, the park is closed by an outbreak of typhus in the south. They have the canyon to themselves. What do they mean when they tell the home folks of their good luck: "We had the whole place to ourselves"? How does one see the thing better when the others are absent? Is looking like sucking: the more lookers, the less there is to see? They could hardly answer, but by saying this they testify to a state of affairs which is considerably more complex than the simple statement of the schoolbook about the Spaniard and the millions who followed him. It is a state in which there is a complex distribution of sovereignty, of zoning.

It may be recovered in a time of national disaster. The Bright Angel Lodge is converted into a rest home, a function that has nothing to do with the canyon a few yards away. A wounded man is brought in. He regains consciousness; there outside his window is the canyon.

The most extreme case of access by privilege conferred by disaster is the Huxleyan novel of the adventures of the surviving remnant after the great wars of the twentieth century. An expedition from Australia lands in Southern California and heads east. They stumble across the Bright Angel Lodge, now fallen into ruins. The trails are grown over, the guard rails fallen away, the dime telescope at Battleship Point rusted. But there is the canyon, exposed at last. Exposed by what? By the decay of those facilities which were designed to help the sightseer.

This dialectic of sightseeing cannot be taken into account by planners, for the object of the dialectic is nothing other than the subversion of the efforts of the planners.

The dialectic is not known to objective theorists, psychologists, and the like. Yet it is quite well known in the fantasy-consciousness of the popular arts. The devices by which the museum exhibit, the Grand Canyon, the ordinary thing, is recovered have long since been stumbled upon. A movie shows a man visiting the Grand Canyon. But the movie maker knows something the planner does not know. He knows that one cannot take the sight frontally. The canyon must be approached by the

stratagems we have mentioned: the Inside Track, the Familiar Revisited, the Accidental Encounter. Who is the stranger at the Bright Angel Lodge? Is he the ordinary tourist from Terre Haute that he makes himself out to be? He is not. He has another objective in mind, to revenge his wronged brother, counterespionage, etc. By virtue of the fact that he has other fish to fry, he may take a stroll along the rim after supper and then we can see the canyon through him. The movie accomplishes its purpose by concealing it. Overtly the characters (the American family marooned by typhus) and we the onlookers experience pity for the sufferers, and the family experience anxiety for themselves; covertly and in truth they are the happiest of people and we are happy through them, for we have the canyon to ourselves. The movie cashes in on the recovery of sovereignty through disaster. Not only is the canyon now accessible to the remnant: the members of the remnant are now accessible to each other, a whole new ensemble of relations becomes possible — friendship, love, hatred, clandestine sexual adventures. In a movie when a man sits next to a woman on a bus, it is necessary either that the bus break down or that the woman lose her memory. (The question occurs to one: Do you imagine there are sightseers who see sights just as they are supposed to? a family who live in Terre Haute, who decide to take the canyon tour, who go there, see it, enjoy it immensely, and go home content? a family who are entirely innocent of all the barriers, zones, losses of sovereignty I have been talking about? Wouldn't most people be sorry if Battleship Point fell into the canyon, carrying all one's fellow passengers to their death, leaving one alone on the South Rim? I cannot answer this. Perhaps there are such people. Certainly a great many American families would swear they had no such problems, that they came, saw, and went away happy. Yet it is just these families who would be happiest if they had gotten the Inside Track and been among the surviving remnant.)

It is now apparent that as between the many measures which may be taken to overcome the opacity, the boredom, of the direct confrontation of the thing or creature in its citadel of symbolic investiture, some are less authentic than others. That is to say, some stratagems obviously serve other purposes than that of providing access to being — for example, various unconscious motivations which it is not necessary to go into here.

Let us take an example in which the recovery of being is ambiguous, where it may under the same circumstances contain both authentic and unauthentic components. An American couple, we will say, drives down into Mexico. They see the usual sights and have a fair time of it. Yet they are never without the sense of missing something. Although Taxco and Cuernavaca are interesting and picturesque as advertised, they fall short of "it." What do the couple have in mind by "it"? What do they really hope for? What sort of experience could they have in Mexico so that upon their return, they would feel that "it" had happened? We have a clue: Their hope has something to do with their own role as tourists in a foreign country and the way in which they conceive this role. It has something to do with other American tourists. Certainly they feel that they are very far from

"it" when, after traveling five thousand miles, they arrive at the plaza in Guanajuato only to find themselves surrounded by a dozen other couples from the Midwest.

Already we may distinguish authentic and unauthentic elements. First, we see the problem the couple faces and we understand their efforts to surmount it. The problem is to find an "unspoiled" place. "Unspoiled" does not mean only that a place is left physically intact; it means also that it is not encrusted by renown and by the familiar (as in Taxco), that it has not been discovered by others. We understand that the couple really want to get at the place and enjoy it. Yet at the same time we wonder if there is not something wrong in their dislike of their compatriots. Does access to the place require the exclusion of others?

Let us see what happens.

The couple decide to drive from Guanajuato to Mexico City. On the way they get lost. After hours on a rocky mountain road, they find themselves in a tiny valley not even marked on the map. There they discover an Indian village. Some sort of religious festival is going on. It is apparently a corn dance in supplication of the rain god.

The couple know at once that this is "it." They are entranced. They spend several days in the village, observing the Indians and being themselves observed with friendly curiosity.

Now may we not say that the sightseers have at last come face to face with an authentic sight, a sight which is charming, quaint, picturesque, unspoiled, and that they see the sight and come away rewarded? Possibly this may occur. Yet it is more likely that what happens is a far cry indeed from an immediate encounter with being, that the experience, while masquerading as such, is in truth a rather desperate impersonation. I use the word *desperate* advisedly to signify an actual loss of hope.

The clue to the spuriousness of their enjoyment of the village and the festival is a certain restiveness in the sightseers themselves. It is given expression by their repeated exclamations that "this is too good to be true," and by their anxiety that it may not prove to be so perfect, and finally by their downright relief at leaving the valley and having the experience in the bag, so to speak — that is, safely embalmed in memory and movie film.

What is the source of their anxiety during the visit? Does it not mean that the couple are looking at the place with a certain standard of performance in mind? Are they like Fabre, who gazed at the world about him with wonder, letting it be what it is; or are they not like the overanxious mother who sees her child as one performing, now doing badly, now doing well? The village is their child and their love for it is an anxious love because they are afraid that at any moment it might fail them.

We have another clue in their subsequent remark to an ethnologist friend. "How we wished you had been there with us! What a perfect goldmine of folkways! Every minute we would say to each other, if only you were here! You must return with us." This surely testifies to a generosity of spirit, a willingness to share their experience with others, not at all like their feelings toward their fellow Iowans on the plaza at Guanajuato!

I am afraid this is not the case at all. It is true that they longed for their ethnologist friend, but it was for an entirely different reason. They wanted him, not to share their experience, but to certify their experience as genuine.

"This is it" and "Now we are really living" do not necessarily refer to the sovereign encounter of the person with the sight that enlivens the mind and gladdens the heart. It means that now at last we are having the acceptable experience. The present experience is always measured by a prototype, the "it" of their dreams. "Now I am really living" means that now I am filling the role of sightseer and the sight is living up to the prototype of sights. This quaint and picturesque village is measured by a Platonic ideal of the Quaint and the Picturesque.

Hence their anxiety during the encounter. For at any minute something could go wrong. A fellow Iowan might emerge from a 'dobe hut; the chief might show them his Sears catalog. (If the failures are "wrong" enough, as these are, they might still be turned to account as rueful conversation pieces. "There we were expecting the chief to bring us a churinga and he shows up with a Sears catalog!") They have snatched victory from disaster, but their experience always runs the danger of failure.

They need the ethnologist to certify their experience as genuine. This is borne out by their behavior when the three of them return for the next corn dance. During the dance, the couple do not watch the goings-on; instead they watch the ethnologist! Their highest hope is that their friend should find the dance interesting. And if he should show signs of true absorption, an interest in the goings-on so powerful that he becomes oblivious of his friends — then their cup is full. "Didn't we tell you?" they say at last. What they want from him is not ethnological explanations; all they want is his approval.

What has taken place is a radical loss of sovereignty over that which is as much theirs as it is the ethnologist's. The fault does not lie with the ethnologist. He has no wish to stake a claim to the village; in fact, he desires the opposite: he will bore his friends to death by telling them about the village and the meaning of the folkways. A degree of sovereignty has been surrendered by the couple. It is the nature of the loss, moreover, that they are not aware of the loss, beyond a certain uneasiness. (Even if they read this and admitted it, it would be very difficult for them to bridge the gap in their confrontation of the world. Their consciousness of the corn dance cannot escape their consciousness of their consciousness, so that with the onset of the first direct enjoyment, their higher consciousness pounces and certifies: "Now you are doing it! Now you are really living!" and, in certifying the experience, sets it at naught.)

Their basic placement in the world is such that they recognize a priority of title of the expert over his particular department of being. The whole horizon of being is staked out by "them," the experts. The highest satisfaction of the sightseer (not merely the tourist but any layman seer of sights) is that his sight should be certified as genuine. The worst of this impoverishment is that there is no sense of impoverishment.

The surrender of title is so complete that it never even occurs to one to reassert title. A poor man may envy the rich man, but the sightseer does not envy the expert. When a caste system becomes absolute, envy disappears. Yet the caste of layman-expert is not the fault of the expert. It is due altogether to the eager surrender of sovereignty by the layman so that he may take up the role not of the person but of the consumer.

I do not refer only to the special relation of layman to theorist. I refer to the general situation in which sovereignty is surrendered to a class of privileged knowers, whether these be theorists or artists. A reader may surrender sovereignty over that which has been written about,

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just as a consumer may surrender sovereignty over a thing which has been theorized about. The consumer is content to receive an experience just as it has been presented to him by theorists and planners. The reader may also be content to judge life by whether it has or has not been formulated by those who know and write about life. A young man goes to France. He too has a fair time of it, sees the sights, enjoys the food. On his last day, in fact as he sits in a restaurant in Le Havre

waiting for his boat, something happens. A group of French students in the restaurant get into an impassioned argument over a recent play. A riot takes place. Madame la concierge joins in, swinging her mop at the rioters. Our young American is transported. This is "it." And he had almost left France without seeing "it"!

But the young man's delight is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is a pleasure for him to encounter the same Gallic temperament he had heard about from Puccini and Rolland. But on the other hand, the source of his pleasure testifies to a certain alienation. For the young man is actually barred from a direct encounter with anything French excepting only that which has been set forth, authenticated by Puccini and Rolland — those who know. If he had encountered the restaurant scene without reading Hemingway, without knowing that the performance was so typically, charmingly French, he would not have been delighted. He would only have been anxious at seeing things get so out of hand. The source of his delight is the sanction of those who know.

This loss of sovereignty is not a marginal process, as might appear from my example of estranged sightseers. It is a generalized surrender of the horizon to those experts within whose competence a particular segment of the horizon is thought to lie. Kwakiutls are surrendered to Franz Boas; decaying Southern mansions are surrendered to Faulkner and Tennessee Williams. So that, although it is by no means the intention of the expert to expropriate sovereignty — in fact he would not even know what sovereignty meant in this context — the danger of theory and consumption is a seduction and deprivation of the consumer.

In the New Mexico desert, natives occasionally come across strange-looking artifacts which have fallen from the skies and which are stenciled: *Return to U.S. Experimental Project, Alamogordo. Reward.* The finder returns the object and is rewarded. He knows nothing of the nature of the object he has found and does not care to know. The sole role of the native, the highest role he can play, is that of finder and returner of the mysterious equipment.

The same is true of the laymen's relation to *natural* objects in a modern technical society. No matter what the object or event is, whether it is a star, a swallow, a Kwakiutl, a "psychological phenomenon," the layman who confronts it does not confront it as a sovereign person, as Crusoe confronts a seashell he finds on the beach. The highest role he can conceive himself as playing is to be able to recognize the title of the object, to return it to the appropriate expert and have it certified as a genuine find. He does not even permit himself to see the thing — as Gerard Hopkins could see a rock or a cloud or a field. If anyone asks him why he doesn't look, he may reply that he didn't take that subject in college (or he hasn't read Faulkner).

This loss of sovereignty extends even to oneself. There is the neurotic who asks nothing more of his doctor than that his symptoms should prove interesting. When all else fails, the poor fellow has nothing to offer but his own neurosis. But even this is sufficient if only the doctor will show interest when he says, "Last night I had a curious sort of dream; perhaps it will be significant to one who knows about such things. It seems I was standing in a sort of alley — " (I have nothing else to offer you but my own unhappiness. Please say that it, at least, measures up, that it is a *proper* sort of unhappiness.)

II

A young Falkland Islander walking along a beach and spying a dead dogfish and going to work on it with his jackknife has, in a fashion wholly unprovided in modern educational theory, a great advantage over the Scarsdale high-school pupil who finds the dogfish on his laboratory desk. Similarly the citizen of Huxley's *Brave New World* who stumbles across a volume of Shakespeare in some vine-grown ruins and squats on a potsherd to read it is in a fairer way of getting at a sonnet than the Harvard sophomore taking English Poetry II.

The educator whose business it is to teach students biology or poetry is unaware of a whole ensemble of relations which exist between the student and the dogfish and between the student and the Shakespeare sonnet. To put it bluntly: A student who has the desire to get at a dogfish or a Shakespeare sonnet may have the greatest difficulty in salvaging the creature itself from the educational package in which it is presented. The great difficulty is that he is not aware that there is a difficulty; surely, he thinks, in such a fine classroom, with such a fine textbook, the sonnet must come across! What's wrong with me?

The sonnet and the dogfish are obscured by two different processes. The sonnet is obscured by the symbolic package which is formulated not by the sonnet itself but by the *media* through which the sonnet is transmitted, the media which the educators believe for some reason to be transparent. The new textbook, the type, the smell of the page, the classroom, the aluminum windows and the winter sky, the personality of Miss Hawkins — these media which are supposed to transmit the sonnet may only succeed in transmitting themselves. It is only the hardest and cleverest of students who can salvage the sonnet from this many-tissued package. It is only the rarest student who knows that the sonnet must be salvaged from the package. (The educator is well aware that something is wrong, that there is a fatal gap between the student's learning and the student's life: the student reads the poem, appears to understand it, and gives all the answers. But what does he recall if he should happen to read a Shakespeare sonnet twenty years later? Does he recall the poem or does he recall the smell of the page and the smell of Miss Hawkins?)

One might object, pointing out that Huxley's citizen reading his sonnet in the ruins and the Falkland Islander looking at his dogfish on the beach

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also receive them in a certain package. Yes, but the difference lies in the fundamental placement of the student in the world, a placement which makes it possible to extract the thing from the package. The pupil at Scarsdale High sees himself placed as a consumer receiving an experience-package;

but the Falkland Islander exploring his dogfish is a person exercising the sovereign right of a person in his lordship and mastery of creation. He too could use an instructor and a book and a technique, but he would use them as his subordinates, just as he uses his jackknife. The biology student does not use his scalpel as an instrument, he uses it as a magic wand! Since it is a "scientific instrument," it should do "scientific things."

The dogfish is concealed in the same symbolic package as the sonnet. But the dogfish suffers an additional loss. As a consequence of this double deprivation, the Sarah Lawrence student who scores A in zoology is apt to know very little about a dogfish. She is twice removed from the dogfish, once by the symbolic complex by which the dogfish is concealed, once again by the spoliation of the dogfish by theory which renders it invisible. Through no fault of zoology instructors, it is nevertheless a fact that the zoology laboratory at Sarah Lawrence College is one of the few places in the world where it is all but impossible to see a dogfish.

The dogfish, the tree, the seashell, the American Negro, the dream, are rendered invisible by a shift of reality from concrete thing to theory which Whitehead has called the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. It is the mistaking of an idea, a principle, an abstraction, for the real. As a consequence of the shift, the "specimen" is seen as less real than the theory of the specimen. As Kierkegaard said, once a person is seen as a specimen of a race or a species, at that very moment he ceases to be an individual. Then there are no more individuals but only specimens.

To illustrate: A student enters a laboratory which, in the pragmatic view, offers the student the optimum conditions under which an educational experience may be had. In the existential view, however — that view of the student in which he is regarded not as a receptacle of experience but as a knowing being whose peculiar property it is to see himself as being in a certain situation — the modern laboratory could not have been more effectively designed to conceal the dogfish forever.

The student comes to his desk. On it, neatly arranged by his instructor, he finds his laboratory manual, a dissecting board, instruments, and a mimeographed list:

Exercise 22: Materials

- 1 dissecting board
- 1 scalpel
- 1 forceps
- 1 probe
- 1 bottle india ink and syringe
- 1 specimen of *Squalus acanthias*

The clue of the situation in which the student finds himself is to be found in the last item: 1 specimen of *Squalus acanthias*,

The phrase *specimen of* expresses in the most succinct way imaginable the radical character of the loss of being which has occurred under his very nose. To refer to the dogfish, the unique concrete existent before him, as a "specimen of *Squalus acanthias*" reveals by its grammar the spoliation of the dogfish by the theoretical method. This phrase, *specimen of*, example of, instance of, indicates the ontological status of the individual creature in the eyes of the theorist. The dogfish itself is seen as a rather shabby expression of an ideal reality, the species *Squalus acanthias*. The result is the radical devaluation of the individual dogfish. (The *reductio ad absurdum* of Whitehead's shift is Toynbee's employment of it in his historical method. If a gram of NaCl is referred to by the chemist as a "sample of" NaCl, one may think of it as such and not much is missed by the oversight of the act of being of this particular pinch of salt, but when the Jews and the Jewish religion are understood as — in Toynbee's favorite phrase — a "classical example of" such and such a kind of *Voelkerwanderung*, we begin to suspect that something is being left out.)

If we look into the ways in which the student can recover the dogfish (or the sonnet), we will see that they have in common the stratagem of avoiding the educator's direct presentation of the object as a lesson to be learned and restoring access to sonnet and dogfish as beings to be known, reasserting the sovereignty of knower over known.

In truth, the biography of scientists and poets is usually the story of the discovery of the indirect approach, the circumvention of the educator's presentation — the young man who was sent to the *Technikum* and on his way fell into the habit of loitering in book stores and reading poetry; or the young man dutifully attending law school who on the way became curious about the comings and goings of ants. One remembers the scene in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* where the girl hides in the bushes to hear

the Capehart in the big house play Beethoven. Perhaps she was the lucky one after all. Think of the unhappy souls inside, who see the record, worry about scratches, and most of all worry about whether they are *getting it*, whether they are bona fide music lovers. What is the best way to hear Beethoven: sitting in a proper silence around the Capehart or eavesdropping from an azalea bush?

However it may come about, we notice two traits of the second situation: (1) an openness of the thing before one — instead of being an exercise to be learned according to an approved mode, it is a garden of delights which beckons to one; (2) a sovereignty of the knower — instead of being a consumer of a prepared experience, I am a sovereign wayfarer, a wanderer in the neighborhood of being who stumbles into the garden.

One can think of two sorts of circumstances through which the thing may be restored to the person. (There is always, of course, the direct recovery: A student may simply be strong enough, brave enough, clever enough to take the dogfish and the sonnet by storm, to wrest control of it from the educators and the educational package.) First by ordeal: The Bomb falls; when the young man recovers consciousness in the shambles of the biology laboratory, there not ten inches from his nose lies the dogfish. Now all at once he can see it directly and without let, just as the exile or the prisoner or the sick man sees the sparrow at his window in all its inexhaustibility; just as the commuter who has had a heart attack sees his own hand for the first time. In these cases, the simulacrum of everydayness and of consumption has been destroyed by disaster; in the case of the bomb, literally destroyed. Secondly, by apprenticeship to a great man: one day a great biologist walks into the laboratory; he stops in front of our student's desk; he leans over, picks up the dogfish, and, ignoring instruments and procedure, probes with a broken fingernail into the little carcass. "Now here is a curious business," he says, ignoring also the proper jargon of the specialty. "Look here how this little duct reverses its direction and drops into the pelvis. Now if you would look into a coelacanth, you would see that it —" And all at once the student can see. The technician and the sophomore who loves his textbooks are always offended by the genuine research man because the latter is usually a little vague and always humble before the thing; he doesn't have much use for the equipment or the jargon. Whereas the technician is never vague and never humble before the thing; he holds the thing disposed of by the principle, the formula, the textbook outline; and he thinks a great deal of equipment and jargon.

But since neither of these methods of recovering the dogfish is pedagogically feasible — perhaps the great man even less so than the Bomb — I wish to propose the following educational technique which should prove equally effective for Harvard and Shreveport High School. I propose that English poetry and biology should be taught as usual, but that at irregular intervals, poetry students should find dogfishes on their desks and biology students should find Shakespeare sonnets on their dissection boards. I am serious in declaring that a Sarah Lawrence English major who began poking about in a dogfish with a bobby pin would learn more

in thirty minutes than a biology major in a whole semester; and that the latter upon reading on her dissecting board

That time of year Thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold —
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang

might catch fire at the beauty of it.

The situation of the tourist at the Grand Canyon and the biology student are special cases of a predicament in which everyone finds himself in a modern technical society — a society, that is, in which there is a division between expert and layman, planner and consumer, in which experts and planners take special measures to teach and edify the consumer. The measures taken are measures appropriate to the consumer: the expert and the planner *know* and *plan*, but the consumer *needs* and *experiences*.

There is a double deprivation. First, the thing is lost through its packaging. The very means by which the thing is presented for consumption, the very techniques by which the thing is made available as an item of need-satisfaction, these very means operate to remove the thing from the sovereignty of the knower. A loss of title occurs. The measures which the museum curator takes to present the thing to the public are self-liquidating. The upshot of the curator's efforts are not that everyone can see the exhibit but that no one can see it. The curator protests: Why are they so indifferent? Why do they even deface the exhibit? Don't they know it is theirs? But it is not theirs. It is his, the curator's. By the most exclusive sort of zoning, the museum exhibit, the park oak tree, is part of an ensemble, a package, which is almost impenetrable to them. The archaeologist who puts his find in a museum so that everyone can see it accomplishes the reverse of his expectations. The result of his action is that no one can see it now but the archaeologist. He would have done better to keep it in his pocket and show it now and then to strangers.

The tourist who carves his initials in a public place, which is theoretically "his" in the first place, has good reasons for doing so, reasons which the exhibitor and planner know nothing about. He does so because in his role of consumer of an experience (a "recreational experience" to satisfy a "recreational need") he knows that he is disinherited. He is deprived of his title over being. He knows very well that he is in a very special sort of zone in which his only rights are the rights of a consumer. He moves like a ghost through schoolroom, city streets, trains, parks, movies. He carves his initials as a last desperate measure to escape his ghostly role of consumer. He is saying in effect: I am not a ghost after all; I am a sovereign person. And he establishes title the only way remaining to him, by staking his claim over one square inch of wood or stone.

Does this mean that we should get rid of museums? No, but it means that the sightseer should be prepared to enter into a struggle to recover a sight from a museum.

The second loss is the spoliation of the thing, the tree, the rock, the swallow, by the layman's misunderstanding of scientific theory. He believes that the thing is *disposed of* by theory, that it stands in the Platonic relation of being a *specimen* of such and such an underlying principle. In the transmission of scientific theory from theorist to layman, the expectation of the theorist is reversed. Instead of the marvels of the universe being made available to the public, the universe is disposed of by theory. The loss of sovereignty takes this form: as a result of the science of botany, trees are not made available to every man. On the contrary. The tree loses its proper density and mystery as a concrete existent and, as merely another *specimen* of a species, becomes itself nugatory.

Does this mean that there is no use taking biology at Harvard and Shreveport High? No, but it means that the student should know what a fight he has on his hands to rescue the specimen from the educational package. The educator is only partly to blame. For there is nothing the educator can do to provide for this need of the student. Everything the educator does only succeeds in becoming, for the student, part of the educational package. The highest role of the educator is the maieutic role of Socrates: to help the student come to himself not as a consumer of experience but as a sovereign individual.

The thing is twice lost to the consumer. First, sovereignty is lost: it is theirs, not his. Second, it is radically devalued by theory. This is a loss which has been brought about by science but through no fault of the scientist and through no fault of scientific theory. The loss has come about as a consequence of the seduction of the layman by science. The layman will be seduced as long as he regards beings as consumer items to be experienced rather than prizes to be won, and as long as he waives his sovereign rights as a person and accepts his role of consumer as the highest estate to which the layman can aspire.

As Mounier said, the person is not something one can study and provide for; he is something one struggles for. But unless he also struggles for himself, unless he knows that there is a struggle, he is going to be just what the planners think he is.



QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Percy's essay proceeds by adding example to example, one after another. If all the examples were meant to illustrate the same thing, the same general point or idea, then one would most likely have been enough. The rest would have been redundant. It makes sense, then, to assume that each example gives a different view of what Percy is saying, that each modifies the others, or qualifies them, or adds a piece that was otherwise lacking. It's as though Percy needed one more to get it right or to figure out what was missing along the way. As you read back through the essay, pay particular attention to the differences between the examples (between the various tourists

going to the Grand Canyon, or between the tourists at the Grand Canyon and the tourists in Mexico). Also note the logic or system that leads from one to the next. What progress of thought is represented by the movement from one example to another, or from tourists to students?

2. The essay is filled with talk about “loss” — the loss of sovereignty, the loss of the creature — but it is resolutely ambiguous about what it is that we have lost. As you work your way back through, note the passages that describe what we are missing and why we should care. Are we to believe, for example, that Cárdenas actually had it (whatever “it” is) — that he had no preconceived notions when he saw the Grand Canyon? Mightn’t he have said, “I claim this for my queen” or “There I see the glory of God” or “This wilderness is not fit for man”? To whom, or in the name of what, is this loss that Percy chronicles such a matter of concern? If this is not just Percy’s peculiar prejudice, if we are asked to share his concerns, whose interests or what interests are represented here?
3. The essay is made up of stories or anecdotes, all of them fanciful. Percy did not, in other words, turn to first-person accounts of visitors to the Grand Canyon or to statements by actual students or teachers. Why not, do you suppose? What does this choice say about his “method” — about what it can and can’t do? As you reread the essay, look for sections you could use to talk about the power and limits of Percy’s method.

• • • • • ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Percy tells several stories — some of them quite good stories — but it is often hard to know just what he is getting at, just what point he is trying to make. If he’s making an argument, it’s not the sort of argument that is easy to summarize. And if the stories (or anecdotes) are meant to serve as examples, they are not the sort of examples that lead directly to a single, general conclusion or that serve to clarify a point or support an obvious thesis. In fact, at the very moment when you expect Percy to come forward and pull things together, he offers yet another story, as though another example, rather than any general statement, would get you closer to what he is saying.

There are, at the same time, terms and phrases to suggest that this is an essay with a point to make. Percy talks, for example, about “the loss of sovereignty,” “symbolic packages,” “consumers of experience,” and “dialectic,” and it seems that these terms and phrases are meant to name or comment on key scenes, situations, or characters in the examples.

For this assignment, tell a story of your own, one that is suggested by the stories Percy tells — perhaps a story about a time you went looking for something or at something, or about a time when you did or did not find a dogfish in your Shakespeare class. You should imagine that you are carrying out a project that Percy has begun, a project that has you looking back at your own experience through the lens of “The Loss of the Creature,” noticing

what Percy would notice and following the paths that he would find interesting. Try to bring the terms that Percy uses — like “sovereign,” “consumer,” “expert,” and “dialectic” — to bear on the story you have to tell. Feel free to imitate Percy’s style and method in your essay.

2. Percy charts several routes to the Grand Canyon: you can take the packaged tour, you can get off the beaten track, you can wait for a disaster, you can follow the “dialectical movement which brings one back to the beaten track but at a level above it.” This last path (or stratagem), he says, is for the complex traveler.

Our complex friend stands behind his fellow tourists at the Bright Angel Lodge and sees the canyon through them and their predicament, their picture taking and busy disregard. In a sense, he exploits his fellow tourists; he stands on their shoulders to see the canyon. (p. 438)

The complex traveler sees the Grand Canyon through the example of the common tourists with “their predicament, their picture taking and busy disregard.” He “stands on their shoulders” to see the canyon. This distinction between complex and common approaches is an important one in the essay. It is interesting to imagine how the distinction could be put to work to define ways of reading.

Suppose that you read “The Loss of the Creature” as a common reader. What would you see? What would you identify as key sections of the text? What would you miss? What would you say about what you see?

If you think of yourself, now, as a complex reader, modeled after any of Percy’s more complex tourists or students, what would you see? What would you identify as key sections of the text? What would you miss? What would you say about what you see?

For this assignment, write an essay with three sections. You may number them, if you choose. The first section should represent the work of a common reader with “The Loss of the Creature,” and the second should represent the work of a complex reader. The third section should look back and comment on the previous two. In particular, you might address these questions: Why might a person prefer one reading over the other? What is to be gained or lost with both?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. In her essay “Arts of the Contact Zone” (p. 454), Mary Louise Pratt shares some of Walker Percy’s concerns for how we do and don’t connect to the world around us. Pratt is interested in attempts — and failures — to connect across differences in culture, language, status, and power. And Percy — well, he is harder to pin down.

As you reread these two essays, see how and where Pratt’s notion of the “contact zone” might provide access to some of the examples and concerns

in Percy's essay. What are the "contact zones" that concern him? How are they defined? What "arts" might he be proposing for those who find themselves in such a place or at such a moment?

Pratt and Percy could be said to be asking similar questions, and they write with similar urgency. What is equally interesting, perhaps, are their differences. Write an essay in which you consider Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" in relation to Percy's argument in "The Loss of the Creature." And in the end, so far as you are concerned, who speaks to you most convincingly? Which essay do you find more compelling?

2. One way to imagine Crucet's "Going Cowboy" (p. 258) is as an act of witnessing, an act of looking in on another way of life from one's own position. Ruth Behar is also concerned with this question of witnessing. She writes of anthropology as "the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of witnessing" (p. 111). The problem, though, as Behar goes on to explain, is figuring out how to convey that experience of witnessing after the witnessed event has occurred. Behar describes that problem, explaining that "An anthropologist's conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrecoverable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense" (pp. 112–13).

Crucet's "Going Cowboy" and Percy's "Loss of the Creature" can also be read as essays about the problems of witnessing and representation. Write an essay which compares how these three authors approach witnessing and representation. How do they understand these acts and the problems they present in fundamentally different ways? How do they see the effects of previous knowledge and subjective experiences? In what ways are their approaches to recovery from these problems similar and different? And how might the subjects that each of these writers are exploring shape their attitudes?

3. Percy develops a metaphor of tourists observing the Grand Canyon to make arguments about the ways in which a preconceived "symbolic complex" prevents tourists from actually seeing the sites they've come to see—in this case, the Grand Canyon itself. The tourists, Percy argues, instead see whatever it is they expect to see.

In his book *After the Last Sky* and in the chapter we have selected from that book, "States" (p. 523), Edward Said documents and reflects upon his return to Palestine, his homeland. He thinks about how hard it is to return, to find the places and the people he left. And Said thinks about how difficult it has been for the Palestinian people to be seen or heard by the rest of the world. With a photographer, Jean Mohr, he sets out to document his trip.

Reread "The Loss of the Creature" alongside "States," looking for a particular section or particular passages in each that seem to speak to the same issues—sight, direct experience, knowledge, preconception, and recovery. Write an essay that considers the ways these two essays might be said to speak back and forth to each other, with a particular eye to the differences in time, place, and argument. And, as a way to end your essay, think about what bearing these readings, these two authors and their work as you know it, might have on your own thought and experience.



MARY LOUISE Pratt

Mary Louise Pratt (b. 1948) grew up in Listowel, Ontario, a small Canadian farm town. She got her BA at the University of Toronto and her PhD from Stanford University, where for nearly thirty years she was a professor in the departments of comparative literature and Spanish and Portuguese. At Stanford, she was one of the cofounders of the new freshman culture program, a controversial series of required courses that replaced the old Western civilization core courses. The course she is particularly associated with is called "Europe and the Americas"; it brings together European representations of the Americas with indigenous American texts. As you might guess from the essay that follows, the program at Stanford expanded the range of countries, languages, cultures, and texts that are seen as a necessary introduction to the world; it also, however, revised the very idea of culture that many of us take for granted—particularly the idea that culture, at its best, expresses common values in a common language. Among other awards and honors, Pratt is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University. She is Silver Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at New York University. She served as president of the Modern Language Association for 2003.

Pratt is the author of *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (1977) and coauthor of *Women, Culture, and Politics in Latin America* (1990), the textbook *Linguistics for Students of Literature* (1980), *Amor Brujo: The Images and Culture of Love in the Andes* (1990), and *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992). The essay that follows was revised to serve as the introduction to *Imperial Eyes*, which examines European travel writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Europe was "discovering" Africa and the Americas. It argues that travel writing produced "the rest of the world" for European readers. It didn't "report" on Africa or South America; it produced an "Africa" or an "America" for European consumption. Travel writing produced places that could be thought of as barren, empty, undeveloped, inconceivable, needful of European influence and control, ready to serve European industrial, intellectual, and commercial interests. The reports of travelers or, later, scientists and anthropologists are part of a more general process by which the emerging industrial nations took possession of new territory.

The European understanding of Peru, for example, came through European accounts, not from attempts to understand or elicit responses from Andeans, Peruvian natives. Such a response was delivered when an Andean, Guaman Poma, wrote to King Philip III of Spain, but his letter was unreadable. Pratt is interested in just those moments of contact between peoples and cultures. She is interested in how King Philip read (or failed to read) a letter from Peru, but also in how someone like Guaman Poma prepared himself to write to the king of Spain. To fix these moments, she makes use of a phrase she coined, the "contact zone." She explains:

I use [this term] to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. . . . By using the term "contact," I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices. (IMPERIAL EYES, PP. 6-7)

"Arts of the Contact Zone" was first written as a lecture. It was delivered as a keynote address at the second Modern Language Association Literacy Conference, held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1990.

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Arts of the Contact Zone

Whenever the subject of literacy comes up, what often pops first into my mind is a conversation I overheard eight years ago between my son Sam and his best friend, Willie, aged six and seven, respectively: "Why don't you trade me Many Trails for Carl Yats . . . Yesits . . . Ya-strum-scrum." "That's not how you say it, dummy, it's Carl Yes . . . Yes . . . oh, I don't know." Sam and Willie had just discovered baseball cards. Many Trails was their decoding, with the help of first-grade English phonics, of the name Manny Trillo. The name they were quite rightly stumped on was Carl Yastrzemski. That was the first time I remembered seeing them put their incipient literacy to their own use, and I was of course thrilled.

Sam and Willie learned a lot about phonics that year by trying to decipher surnames on baseball cards, and a lot about cities, states, heights, weights, places of birth, stages of life. In the years that followed, I watched Sam apply his arithmetic skills to working out batting averages and subtracting retirement years from rookie years; I watched him develop senses of patterning and order by arranging and rearranging his cards for hours on end, and aesthetic judgment by comparing different photos, different series, layouts, and color schemes. American geography and history took shape in his mind through baseball cards. Much of his social life revolved around trading them, and he learned about exchange, fairness, trust, the importance of processes as opposed to results, what it means to get cheated, taken advantage of, even robbed. Baseball cards were the medium of his economic life too. Nowhere better to learn the power and arbitrariness of money, the absolute divorce between use value and exchange value, notions of long- and short-term investment, the possibility of personal values that are independent of market values.

Baseball cards meant baseball card shows, where there was much to be learned about adult worlds as well. And baseball cards opened the door to baseball books, shelves and shelves of encyclopedias, magazines, histories, biographies, novels, books of jokes, anecdotes, cartoons, even poems. Sam learned the history of American racism and the struggle against it through baseball; he saw the Depression and two world wars from behind home plate. He learned the meaning of commodified labor, what it means for one's body and talents to be owned and dispensed by another. He knows something about Japan, Taiwan, Cuba, and Central America and how men and boys do things there. Through the history and experience of baseball stadiums he thought about architecture, light, wind, topography, meteorology, the dynamics of public space. He learned the meaning of expertise, of knowing about something well enough that you can start a conversation with a stranger and feel sure of holding your own. Even with an adult — especially with an adult. Throughout his preadolescent years, baseball history was Sam's luminous

point of contact with grown-ups, his lifeline to caring. And, of course, all this time he was also playing baseball, struggling his way through the stages of the local Little League system, lucky enough to be a pretty good player, loving the game and coming to know deeply his strengths and weaknesses.

Literacy began for Sam with the newly pronounceable names on the picture cards and brought him what has been easily the broadest, most varied, most enduring, and most integrated experience of his thirteen-year life. Like many parents, I was delighted to see schooling give Sam the tools with which to find and open all these doors. At the same time I found it unforgivable that schooling itself gave him nothing remotely as meaningful to do, let alone anything that would actually take him beyond the referential, masculinist ethos of baseball and its lore.

However, I was not invited here to speak as a parent, nor as an expert on literacy. I was asked to speak as an MLA [Modern Language Association] member working in the elite academy. In that capacity my contribution is undoubtedly supposed to be abstract, irrelevant, and anchored outside the real world. I wouldn't dream of disappointing anyone. I propose immediately to head back several centuries to a text

**THE LETTER GOT THERE, ONLY
350 YEARS TOO LATE, A MIRACLE AND
A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY.**

that has a few points in common with baseball cards and raises thoughts about what Tony Sarmiento, in his comments to the conference, called new visions of literacy. In 1908 a Peruvianist named Richard Pietschmann was exploring in the Danish Royal Archive in Copenhagen and came across a manuscript. It was dated in the city of Cuzco in Peru, in the year 1613, some forty years after the final fall of the Inca empire to the Spanish and signed with an unmistakably Andean indigenous name: Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. Written in a mixture of Quechua and ungrammatical, expressive Spanish, the manuscript was a letter addressed by an unknown but apparently literate Andean to King Philip III of Spain. What stunned Pietschmann was that the letter was twelve hundred pages long. There were almost eight hundred pages of written text and four hundred of captioned line drawings. It was titled *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*. No one knew (or knows) how the manuscript got to the library in Copenhagen or how long it had been there. No one, it appeared, had ever bothered to read it or figured out how. Quechua was not thought of as a written language in 1908, nor Andean culture as a literate culture.

Pietschmann prepared a paper on his find, which he presented in London in 1912, a year after the rediscovery of Machu Picchu by Hiram Bingham. Reception, by an international congress of Americanists, was apparently confused. It took twenty-five years for a facsimile edition of the work to appear in Paris. It was not till the late 1970s, as positivist reading habits gave way to interpretive studies and colonial elitisms to post-colonial pluralisms, that Western scholars found ways of reading Guaman Poma's *New Chronicle and Good Government* as the extraordinary intercultural tour de force that it was. The letter got there, only 350 years too late, a miracle and a terrible tragedy.

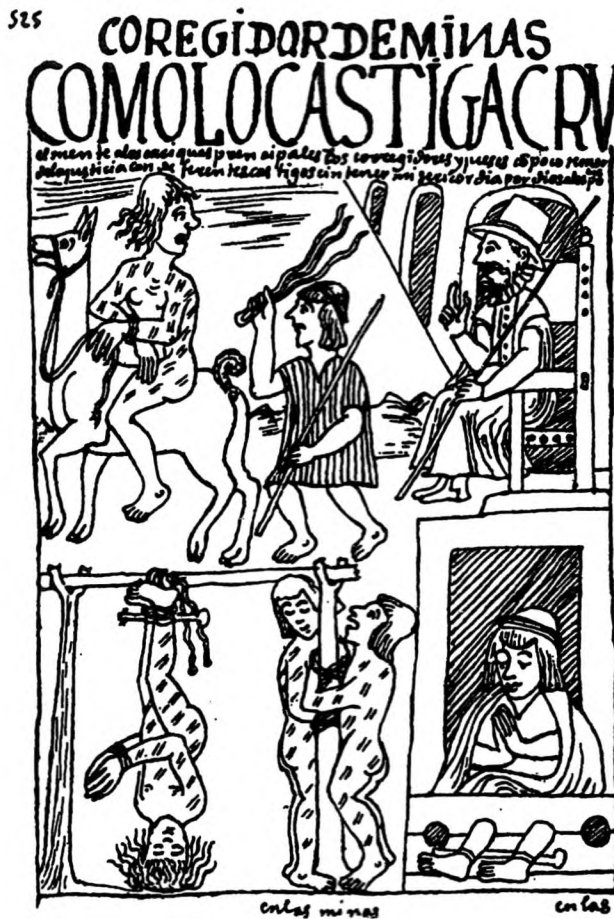
I propose to say a few more words about this erstwhile unreadable text, in order to lay out some thoughts about writing and literacy in what I like to call the *contact zones*. I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. Eventually I will use the term to reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in teaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today. But first a little more about Guaman Poma's giant letter to Philip III.

Insofar as anything is known about him at all, Guaman Poma exemplified the sociocultural complexities produced by conquest and empire. He was an indigenous Andean who claimed noble Inca descent and who had adopted (at least in some sense) Christianity. He may have worked in the Spanish colonial administration as an interpreter, scribe, or assistant to a Spanish tax collector — as a mediator, in short. He says he learned to write from his half brother, a mestizo whose Spanish father had given him access to religious education.

Guaman Poma's letter to the king is written in two languages (Spanish and Quechua) and two parts. The first is called the *Nueva corónica*, "New Chronicle." The title is important. The chronicle of course was the main writing apparatus through which the Spanish presented their American conquests to themselves. It constituted one of the main official discourses. In writing a "new chronicle," Guaman Poma took over the official Spanish genre for his own ends. Those ends were, roughly, to construct a new picture of the world, a picture of a Christian world with Andean rather than European peoples at the center of it — Cuzco, not Jerusalem. In the *New Chronicle* Guaman Poma begins by rewriting the Christian history of the world from Adam and Eve (Fig. 1), incorporating the Amerindians into it as offspring of one of the sons of Noah. He identifies five ages of Christian history that he links in parallel with the five ages of canonical Andean history — separate but equal trajectories that diverge with Noah and reintersect not with Columbus but with Saint Bartholomew, claimed to have preceded Columbus in the Americas. In a couple of hundred pages, Guaman Poma constructs a veritable encyclopedia of Inca and pre-Inca history, customs, laws, social forms, public offices, and dynastic leaders. The depictions resemble European manners and customs description, but also reproduce the meticulous detail with which knowledge in Inca society was stored on *quipus* and in the oral memories of elders.

Guaman Poma's *New Chronicle* is an instance of what I have proposed to call an *autoethnographic* text, by which I mean a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts. Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as autochthonous forms of expression or self-representation (as the Andean *quipus* were). Rather they involve a selective collaboration with

a description of colonial society in the Andean region with a passionate denunciation of Spanish exploitation and abuse. (These, at the time he was writing, were decimating the population of the Andes at a genocidal rate. In fact, the potential loss of the labor force became a main cause for reform of the system.) Guaman Poma's most implacable hostility is invoked by the clergy, followed by the dreaded *corregidores*, or colonial overseers (Fig. 3). He also praises good works, Christian habits, and just men where he finds them, and offers at length his views as to what constitutes "good government and justice." The Indies, he argues, should be administered through a collaboration of Inca and Spanish elites. The epistle ends with an imaginary question-and-answer session in which, in a reversal of hierarchy, the king is depicted asking Guaman Poma questions about how to reform the empire — a dialogue imagined across the many lines that divide the Andean scribe from the imperial monarch, and in which the subordinated subject single-handedly gives himself authority in the colonizer's language and verbal repertoire. In a way, it worked — this extraordinary text did get written — but in a way it did not, for the letter never reached its addressee.



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Figure 3. Corregidor de minas. Catalog of Spanish abuses of indigenous labor force.

**TRANSCULTURATION,
LIKE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY,
IS A PHENOMENON OF
THE CONTACT ZONE.**

To grasp the import of Guaman Poma's project, one needs to keep in mind that the Incas had no system of writing. Their huge empire is said to be the only known instance of a full-blown bureaucratic state society built and administered without writing. Guaman Poma constructs his text by appropriating and adapting pieces of the representational repertoire of the invaders. He does not simply imitate or reproduce it; he selects and adapts it along Andean lines to express (bilingually, mind you) Andean interests and aspirations. Ethnographers have used the term *transculturation* to describe processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture. The term, originally coined by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, aimed to replace overly reductive concepts of acculturation and assimilation used to characterize culture under conquest. While subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for. Transculturation, like autoethnography, is a phenomenon of the contact zone.

As scholars have realized only relatively recently, the transcultural character of Guaman Poma's text is intricately apparent in its visual as well as its written component. The genre of the four hundred line drawings is European — there seems to have been no tradition of representational drawing among the Incas — but in their execution they deploy specifically Andean systems of spatial symbolism that express Andean values and aspirations.¹

In Figure 1, for instance, Adam is depicted on the left-hand side below the sun, while Eve is on the right-hand side below the moon, and slightly lower than Adam. The two are divided by the diagonal of Adam's digging stick. In Andean spatial symbolism, the diagonal descending from the sun marks the basic line of power and authority dividing upper from lower, male from female, dominant from subordinate. In Figure 2, the Inca appears in the same position as Adam, with the Spaniard opposite, and the two at the same height. In Figure 3, depicting Spanish abuses of power, the symbolic pattern is reversed. The Spaniard is in a high position indicating dominance, but on the "wrong" (right-hand) side. The diagonals of his lance and that of the servant doing the flogging mark out a line of illegitimate, though real, power. The Andean figures continue to occupy the left-hand side of the picture, but clearly as victims. Guaman Poma wrote that the Spanish conquest had produced "*un mundo al revés*," "a world in reverse."

In sum, Guaman Poma's text is truly a product of the contact zone. If one thinks of cultures, or literatures, as discrete, coherently structured, monolingual edifices, Guaman Poma's text, and indeed any autoethnographic work, appears anomalous or chaotic — as it apparently did to the European scholars Pietschmann spoke to in 1912. If one does not think of cultures this way, then Guaman Poma's text is simply heterogeneous, as the Andean region was itself and remains today. Such a text is heterogeneous

on the reception end as well as the production end: it will read very differently to people in different positions in the contact zone. Because it deploys European and Andean systems of meaning making, the letter necessarily means differently to bilingual Spanish-Quechua speakers and to monolingual speakers in either language; the drawings mean differently to monocultural readers, Spanish or Andean, and to bicultural readers responding to the Andean symbolic structures embodied in European genres.

In the Andes in the early 1600s there existed a literate public with considerable intercultural competence and degrees of bilingualism. Unfortunately, such a community did not exist in the Spanish court with which Guaman Poma was trying to make contact. It is interesting to note that in the same year Guaman Poma sent off his letter, a text by another Peruvian was adopted in official circles in Spain as the canonical Christian mediation between the Spanish conquest and Inca history. It was another huge encyclopedic work, titled the *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, written, tellingly, by a mestizo, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Like the mestizo half brother who taught Guaman Poma to read and write, Inca Garcilaso was the son of an Inca princess and a Spanish official, and had lived in Spain since he was seventeen. Though he too spoke Quechua, his book is written in eloquent, standard Spanish, without illustrations. While Guaman Poma's life's work sat somewhere unread, the *Royal Commentaries* was edited and reedited in Spain and the New World, a mediation that coded the Andean past and present in ways thought unthreatening to colonial hierarchy.² The textual hierarchy persists; the *Royal Commentaries* today remains a staple item on PhD reading lists in Spanish, while the *New Chronicle and Good Government*, despite the ready availability of several fine editions, is not. However, though Guaman Poma's text did not reach its destination, the transcultural currents of expression it exemplifies continued to evolve in the Andes, as they still do, less in writing than in storytelling, ritual, song, dance-drama, painting and sculpture, dress, textile art, forms of governance, religious belief, and many other vernacular art forms. All express the effects of long-term contact and intractable, unequal conflict.

Autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression — these are some of the literate arts of the contact zone. Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning — these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone. They all live among us today in the transnationalized metropolis of the United States and are becoming more widely visible, more pressing, and, like Guaman Poma's text, more decipherable to those who once would have ignored them in defense of a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality.

CONTACT AND COMMUNITY

The idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy. A couple of years

ago, thinking about the linguistic theories I knew, I tried to make sense of a utopian quality that often seemed to characterize social analyses of language by the academy. Languages were seen as living in "speech communities," and these tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members. This abstract idea of the speech community seemed to reflect, among other things, the utopian way modern nations conceive of themselves as what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities."³ In a book of that title, Anderson observes that with the possible exception of what he calls "primordial villages," human communities exist as *imagined* entities in which people "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion." "Communities are distinguished," he goes on to say, "not by their falsity/genuineness, but by *the style in which they are imagined*" (15; emphasis mine). Anderson proposes three features that characterize the style in which the modern nation is imagined. First, it is imagined as *limited*, by "finite, if elastic, boundaries"; second, it is imagined as *sovereign*; and, third, it is imagined as *fraternal*, "a deep, horizontal comradeship" for which millions of people are prepared "not so much to kill as willingly to die" (15). As the image suggests, the nation-community is embodied metonymically in the finite, sovereign, fraternal figure of the citizen-soldier.

Anderson argues that European bourgeoisies were distinguished by their ability to "achieve solidarity on an essentially imagined basis" (74) on a scale far greater than that of elites of other times and places. Writing and literacy play a central role in this argument. Anderson maintains, as have others, that the main instrument that made bourgeois nation-building projects possible was print capitalism. The commercial circulation of books in the various European vernaculars, he argues, was what first created the invisible networks that would eventually constitute the literate elites and those they ruled as nations. (Estimates are that 180 million books were put into circulation in Europe between the years 1500 and 1600 alone.)

Now obviously this style of imagining of modern nations, as Anderson describes it, is strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize. The prototype of the modern nation as imagined community was, it seemed to me, mirrored in ways people thought about language and the speech community. Many commentators have pointed out how modern views of language as code and competence assume a unified and homogeneous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony — as a device, precisely, for imagining community. An image of a universally shared literacy is also part of the picture. The prototypical manifestation of language is generally taken to be the speech of individual adult native speakers face-to-face (as in Saussure's famous diagram) in monolingual, even monodialectal situations — in short, the most homogeneous case linguistically and socially. The same goes for written communication.

Now one could certainly imagine a theory that assumed different things — that argued, for instance, that the most revealing speech situation for understanding language was one involving a gathering of people each of whom spoke two languages and understood a third and held only one language in common with any of the others. It depends on what workings of language you want to see or want to see first, on what you choose to define as normative.

In keeping with autonomous, fraternal models of community, analyses of language use commonly assume that principles of cooperation and shared understanding are normally in effect. Descriptions of interactions between people in conversation, classrooms, medical and bureaucratic settings, readily take it for granted that the situation is governed by a single set of rules or norms shared by all participants. The analysis focuses then on how those rules produce or fail to produce an orderly, coherent exchange. Models involving games and moves are often used to describe interactions. Despite whatever conflicts or systematic social differences might be in play, it is assumed that all participants are engaged in the same game and that the game is the same for all players. Often it is. But of course it often is not, as, for example, when speakers are from different classes or cultures, or one party is exercising authority and another is submitting to it or questioning it. Last year one of my children moved to a new elementary school that had more open classrooms and more flexible curricula than the conventional school he started out in. A few days into the term, we asked him what it was like at the new school. "Well," he said, "they're a lot nicer, and they have a lot less rules. But know *why* they're nicer?" "Why?" I asked. "So you'll obey all the rules they don't have," he replied. This is a very coherent analysis with considerable elegance and explanatory power, but probably not the one his teacher would have given.

When linguistic (or literate) interaction is described in terms of orderliness, games, moves, or scripts, usually only legitimate moves are actually named as part of the system, where legitimacy is defined from the point of view of the party in authority — regardless of what other parties might see themselves as doing. Teacher-pupil language, for example, tends to be described almost entirely from the point of view of the teacher and teaching, not from the point of view of pupils and pupiling (the word doesn't even exist, though the thing certainly does). If a classroom is analyzed as a social world unified and homogenized with respect to the teacher, whatever students do other than what the teacher specifies is invisible or anomalous to the analysis. This can be true in practice as well. On several occasions my fourth grader, the one busy obeying all the rules they didn't have, was given writing assignments that took the form of answering a series of questions to build up a paragraph. These questions often asked him to identify with the interests of those in power over him — parents, teachers, doctors, public authorities. He invariably sought ways to resist or subvert these assignments. One assignment, for instance, called for imagining "a helpful invention." The students were asked to write single-sentence responses to the following questions:

What kind of invention would help you?
 How would it help you?
 Why would you need it?
 What would it look like?
 Would other people be able to use it also?
 What would be an invention to help your teacher?
 What would be an invention to help your parents?

Manuel's reply read as follows:

A grate adventchin

Some inventchins are GRATE!!!!!!!!!!!!!! My inventchin would be a shot that would put every thing you learn at school in your brain. It would help me by letting me graduate right now!! I would need it because it would let me play with my friends, go on vacachin and, do fun a lot more. It would look like a regular shot. Ather people would use to. This inventchin would help my teacher parents get away from a lot of work. I think a shot like this would be GRATE!

Despite the spelling, the assignment received the usual star to indicate the task had been fulfilled in an acceptable way. No recognition was available, however, of the humor, the attempt to be critical or contestatory, to parody the structures of authority. On that score, Manuel's luck was only slightly better than Guaman Poma's. What is the place of unsolicited oppositional discourse, parody, resistance, critique in the imagined classroom community? Are teachers supposed to feel that their teaching has been most successful when they have eliminated such things and unified the social world, probably in their own image? Who wins when we do that? Who loses?

Such questions may be hypothetical, because in the United States in the 1990s, many teachers find themselves less and less able to do that even if they want to. The composition of the national collectivity is changing and so are the styles, as Anderson put it, in which it is being imagined. In the 1980s in many nation-states, imagined national syntheses that had retained hegemonic force began to dissolve. Internal social groups with histories and lifeways different from the official ones began insisting on those histories and lifeways *as part of their citizenship*, as the very mode of their membership in the national collectivity. In their dialogues with dominant institutions, many groups began asserting a rhetoric of belonging that made demands beyond those of representation and basic rights granted from above. In universities we started to hear, "I don't just want you to let me be here, I want to belong here; this institution should belong to me as much as it does to anyone else." Institutions have responded with, among other things, rhetorics of diversity and multiculturalism whose import at this moment is up for grabs across the ideological spectrum.

These shifts are being lived out by everyone working in education today, and everyone is challenged by them in one way or another. Those of us committed to educational democracy are particularly challenged as

that notion finds itself besieged on the public agenda. Many of those who govern us display, openly, their interest in a quiescent, ignorant, manipulable electorate. Even as an ideal, the concept of an enlightened citizenry seems to have disappeared from the national imagination. A couple of years ago the university where I work went through an intense and wrenching debate over a narrowly defined Western-culture requirement that had been instituted there in 1980. It kept boiling down to a debate over the ideas of national patrimony, cultural citizenship, and imagined community. In the end, the requirement was transformed into a much more broadly defined course called *Cultures, Ideas, Values*.⁴ In the context of the change, a new course was designed that centered on the Americas and the multiple cultural histories (including European ones) that have intersected here. As you can imagine, the course attracted a very diverse student body. The classroom functioned not like a homogeneous community or a horizontal alliance but like a contact zone. Every single text we read stood in specific historical relationships to the students in the class, but the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous. Everybody had a stake in nearly everything we read, but the range and kind of stakes varied widely.

**THE VERY NATURE OF THE
COURSE PUT IDEAS AND
IDENTITIES ON THE LINE.**

It was the most exciting teaching we had ever done, and also the hardest. We were struck, for example, at how anomalous the formal lecture became in a contact zone (who can forget Atahualpa throwing down the Bible because it would not speak to him?). The lecturer's traditional (imagined) task — unifying the world in the class's eyes by means of a monologue that rings equally coherent, revealing, and true for all, forging an ad hoc community, homogeneous with respect to one's own words — this task became not only impossible but anomalous and unimaginable. Instead, one had to work in the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be systematically received in radically heterogeneous ways that we were neither able nor entitled to prescribe.

The very nature of the course put ideas and identities on the line. All the students in the class had the experience, for example, of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students saw their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame; all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility, of others. In the absence of community values and the hope of synthesis, it was easy to forget the positives; the fact, for instance, that kinds of marginalization once taken for granted were gone. Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him or her in it. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom — the joys of the contact zone. The sufferings and revelations were, at different moments to be sure, experienced by every student. No one was excluded, and no one was safe.

The fact that no one was safe made all of us involved in the course appreciate the importance of what we came to call "safe houses." We used the term to refer to social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression. This is why, as we realized, multicultural curricula should not seek to replace ethnic or women's studies, for example. Where there are legacies of subordination, groups need places for healing and mutual recognition, safe houses in which to construct shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world that they can then bring into the contact zone.

Meanwhile, our job in the Americas course remains to figure out how to make that crossroads the best site for learning that it can be. We are looking for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone. These will include, we are sure, exercises in storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. These arts were in play in every room at the extraordinary Pittsburgh conference on literacy. I learned a lot about them there, and I am thankful.

NOTES

¹ For an introduction in English to these and other aspects of Guaman Poma's work, see Rolena Adorno. Adorno and Mercedes Lopez-Baralt pioneered the study of Andean symbolic systems in Guaman Poma. [All notes are Pratt's.]

² It is far from clear that the *Royal Commentaries* was as benign as the Spanish seemed to assume. The book certainly played a role in maintaining the identity and aspirations of indigenous elites in the Andes. In the mid-eighteenth century, a new edition of the *Royal Commentaries* was suppressed by Spanish authorities because its preface included a prophecy by Sir Walter Raleigh that the English would invade Peru and restore the Inca monarchy.

³ The discussion of community here is summarized from my essay "Linguistic Utopias."

⁴ For information about this program and the contents of courses taught in it, write Program in Cultures, Ideas, Values (CIV), Stanford Univ., Stanford, CA 94305.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Perhaps the most interesting question "Arts of the Contact Zone" raises for its readers is how to put together the pieces: the examples from Pratt's children, the discussion of Guaman Poma and the *New Chronicle and Good Government*, the brief history of European literacy, and the discussion of curriculum reform at Stanford. The terms that run through the sections are, among others, these: "contact," "community," "autoethnography," "transculturation." As you reread, mark those passages you might use to trace the general argument that cuts across these examples.
2. This essay was originally delivered as a lecture. Before you read Pratt's essay again, create a set of notes on what you remember as important, relevant, or worthwhile. Imagine yourself as part of her audience. Then reread the essay. Where would you want to interrupt her? What questions could you ask her that might make "Arts of the Contact Zone" more accessible to you?
3. This is an essay about reading and writing and teaching and learning, about the "literate arts" and the "pedagogical arts" of the contact zone. Surely the composition class, the first-year college English class, can be imagined as a contact zone. And it seems in the spirit of Pratt's essay to identify (as a student) with Guaman Poma. As you reread, think about how and where this essay might be said to speak directly to you about your education as a reader and writer in a contact zone.
4. There are some difficult terms in this essay: "autochthonous," "autoethnography," "transculturation." The last two are defined in the text; the first you will have to look up. (We did.) In some ways, the slipperiest of the key words in the essay is "culture." At one point Pratt says,

If one thinks of cultures, or literatures, as discrete, coherently structured, monolingual edifices, Guaman Poma's text, and indeed any autoethnographic work, appears anomalous or chaotic — as it apparently did to the European scholars Pietschmann spoke to in 1912. If one does not think of cultures this way, then Guaman Poma's text is simply heterogeneous, as the Andean region was itself and remains today. Such a text is heterogeneous on the reception end as well as the production end: it will read very differently to people in different positions in the contact zone. (pp. 460–61)

If one thinks of cultures as "coherently structured, monolingual edifices," the text appears one way; if one thinks otherwise, the text is "simply heterogeneous." What might it mean to make this shift in the way one thinks of culture? Can you do it — that is, can you read the *New Chronicle* from both points of view, make the two points of view work in your own imagining? Can you, for example, think of a group that you participate in as a "community"? Then can you think of it as a "contact zone"? Which one seems "natural" to you? What does Pratt assume to be the dominant point of view now, for *her* readers?

As you reread, not only do you want to get a sense of how to explain these two attitudes toward culture, but you also need to practice shifting your point of view from one to the other. Think, from inside the position of each, of the things you would be expected to say about Poma's text, Manuel's invention, and your classroom.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

Here, briefly, are two descriptions of the writing one might find or expect in the "contact zone." They serve as an introduction to the three writing assignments.

Autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression — these are some of the literate arts of the contact zone. Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning — these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone. They all live among us today in the transnationalized metropolis of the United States and are becoming more widely visible, more pressing, and, like Guaman Poma's text, more decipherable to those who once would have ignored them in defense of a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality. (p. 461)

We are looking for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone. These will include, we are sure, exercises in storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. (p. 466)

1. One way of working with Pratt's essay, of extending its project, would be to conduct your own local inventory of writing from the contact zone. You might do this on your own or in teams with others from your class. You will want to gather several similar documents, your "archive," before you make your final selection. Think about how to make that choice. What makes one document stand out as representative? Here are two ways you might organize your search:
 - a. You could look for historical documents. A local historical society might have documents written by Native Americans ("Indians") to the white

settlers. There may be documents written by slaves to masters or to northern whites explaining their experience with slavery. There may be documents by women (like suffragists) trying to negotiate for public positions and rights. There may be documents from any of a number of racial or ethnic groups — Hispanic, Jewish, Irish, Italian, Polish, Swedish — trying to explain their positions to the mainstream culture. There may, perhaps at union halls, be documents written by workers to owners. Your own sense of the heritage of your area should direct your search.

- b. Or you could look for contemporary documents in the print that is around you, things that you might otherwise overlook. Pratt refers to one of the characteristic genres of the Hispanic community, the *"testimonio."* You could look at the writing of any marginalized group, particularly writing intended, at least in part, to represent the experience of outsiders to the dominant culture (or to be in dialogue with that culture or to respond to that culture). These documents, if we follow Pratt's example, would encompass the work of young children or students, including college students.

Once you have completed your inventory, choose a document you would like to work with and present it carefully and in detail (perhaps in even greater detail than Pratt's presentation of the *New Chronicle*). You might imagine that you are presenting this to someone who would not have seen it and would not know how to read it, at least not as an example of the literate arts of the contact zone.

2. Another way of extending the project of Pratt's essay would be to write your own autoethnography. It should not be too hard to locate a setting or context in which you are the "other" — the one who speaks from outside rather than inside the dominant discourse. Pratt says that the position of the outsider is marked not only by differences of language and ways of thinking and speaking but also by differences in power, authority, and status. In a sense, she argues, the only way those in power can understand you is in *their* terms. These are terms you will need to use to tell your story, but your goal is to describe your position in ways that "engage with representations others have made of [you]" without giving in or giving up or disappearing in their already formed sense of who you are.

This is an interesting challenge. One of the things that will make the writing difficult is that the autoethnographic or transcultural text calls upon skills not usually valued in American classrooms: bilingualism, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression, storytelling, unseemly comparisons of high and low cultural forms — these are some of the terms Pratt offers. These do not fit easily with the traditional genres of the writing class (essay, term paper, summary, report) or its traditional values (unity, consistency, sincerity, clarity, correctness, decorum).

You will probably need to take this essay (or whatever it should be called) through several drafts. It might be best to begin as Pratt's student, using her description as a preliminary guide. Once you get a sense of your own project, you may find that you have terms or examples to add to her list of the literate arts of the contact zone.

3. Citing Benedict Anderson and what he calls “imagined communities,” Pratt argues that our idea of community is “strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize” (p. 471). Against this utopian vision of community, Pratt argues that we need to develop ways of understanding (even noticing) social and intellectual spaces that are not homogeneous, unified; we need to develop ways of understanding and valuing difference.

Think of a community of which you are a member, a community that is important to you. And think about the utopian terms you are given to name and describe this community. Think, then, about this group in Pratt’s terms — as a “contact zone.” How would you name and describe this social space? Write an essay in which you present these alternate points of view on a single social group. You will need to present this discussion fully, so that someone who is not part of your group can follow what you say, and you should take time to think about the consequences (for you, for your group) of this shift in point of view, in terms.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Here, from “Arts of the Contact Zone,” is Mary Louise Pratt on the “autoethnographic” text:

Guaman Poma’s *New Chronicle* is an instance of what I have proposed to call an *autoethnographic* text, by which I mean a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts. . . . They involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. . . . Such texts often constitute a marginalized group’s point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture. It is interesting to think, for example, of American slave autobiography in its autoethnographic dimensions, which in some respects distinguish it from Euramerican autobiographical tradition. (pp. 456–57)

John Edgar Wideman’s “Our Time” (p. 603) and the excerpts from Gloria Anzaldúa’s “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” (p. 22) could serve as twentieth-century examples of autoethnographic texts. Choose one of these selections and reread it with “Arts of the Contact Zone” in mind. Write an essay that presents the selection as an example of autoethnographic and/or transcultural texts. You should imagine that you are working to put Pratt’s ideas to the test (*do they do what she says such texts must do?*), but also add what

you have to say concerning this text as a literate effort to be present in the context of difference.

2. In the selection titled "States" (p. 523), Edward Said says,

All cultures spin out a dialectic of self and other, the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object "it" or "you," who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there. From this dialectic comes the series of heroes and monsters, founding fathers and barbarians, prized masterpieces and despised opponents that express a culture from its deepest sense of national self-identity to its refined patriotism, and finally to its coarse jingoism, xenophobia, and exclusivist bias. (p. 547)

This is as true of the Palestinians as it is of the Israelis — although, he adds, "For Palestinian culture, the odd thing is that its own identity is more frequently than not perceived as 'other.'"

Citing Benedict Anderson and what he refers to as "imagined communities," Mary Louise Pratt in "Arts of the Contact Zone" argues that our idea of community is "strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize" (p. 658). Against this utopian vision of community, Pratt argues that we need to develop ways of understanding (noticing or creating) social and intellectual spaces that are not homogeneous or unified — contact zones. She argues that we need to develop ways of understanding and valuing difference.

There are similar goals and objects to these projects. Reread Pratt's essay with Said's "States" in mind. As she defines what she refers to as the "literate arts of the contact zone," can you find points of reference in Said's text? Said's thinking always attends to the importance and the conditions of writing, including his own. There are ways that "States" could be imagined as both "autoethnographic" and "transcultural." How might Said's work allow you to understand the "literate arts of the contact zone" in practice? How might his work allow you to understand the problems and possibilities of such writing beyond what Pratt has imagined, presented, and predicted?

3. In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 456). Atul Gawande, in "Slow Ideas" (p. 325), chronicles the ways that lifesaving innovations and changes for childbirth in India and the treatment of cholera in Bangladesh take hold. At one point in his essay, he writes that the physicians involved in these projects want to change systems in cultures so that particular practices and treatments become daily routines or the norm. "To create new norms," he writes, "you have to understand people's existing norms and barriers to change" (p. 331).

Pratt might argue that those involved in the childbirth and cholera projects interacted in a context of "highly asymmetrical relations of power," where the health-care providers in India and Bangladesh hold the dominant position, trying to get medical treatments to take hold in systems in cultures where neither incentives nor penalties work.

Write an essay in which you consider how Pratt's concept of the contact zone might be useful in helping us understand the ways that change came about in childbirth practices in India and the treatment of cholera in Bangladesh. What might be the "autoethnographic texts" produced during the evolutions of these changes, and how might you say that the caregivers, including Gawande, learned to read them? And, finally, what conclusions might you draw about Gawande's understanding of systemic or cultural change as the development of social and intellectual understanding in a contact zone?

4. In the closing to "Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt describes the arts of the contact zone as:

exercises in story-telling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. (p. 466)

Of course, Pratt's essay was written decades before Jennine Capó Crucet's "Going Cowboy" (p. 258). But one interesting way to read Pratt's comments here is to imagine them as a lens through which to examine Crucet's work. Write an essay in which you discuss Crucet's essay as a possible example of the "Arts of the Contact Zone." You might begin by summarizing Pratt's comments above, highlighting the most important terms and phrases for your work in understanding Crucet's essay in light of Pratt's. What might Pratt have to say about Crucet's essay? How do you see "Going Cowboy" as doing/ extending/challenging Pratt's ideas about "contact zones"? What might Crucet herself have to say to Pratt?

5. Anna Tsing writes, "staying alive — for every species — requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die" (p. 581). While Tsing's work might be categorized as ecological or scientific, there are certainly other writers in this collection that take up questions of diversity and contact. Mary Louise Pratt's notion of "contact zones" might be particularly salient here. Or Gloria Anzaldúa's approach to thinking about language and borders (p. 22).

Write an essay in which you consider Tsing alongside Anzaldúa, Pratt, or another writer in the collection who you believe to be offering a theory of difference — albeit in a very different way from Tsing. What are the connections between the two pieces? What is each writer's approach to difference? How can you use one writer to help us understand the other more fully? What might a conversation between these two writers on the subject of difference look like?

JENNY Price



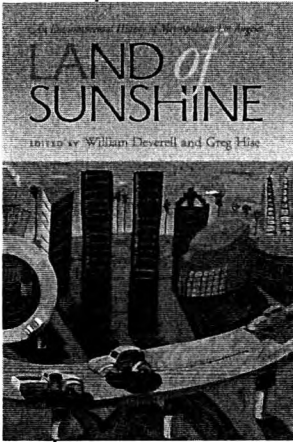
Jenny Price

Writer, nature lover, and historian Jenny Price has worn many hats throughout her life, trying out various careers and passions while always taking care to keep U.S. environmentalism central to her belief system. A lover of the outdoors from an early age, Price spent her Midwest childhood at summer camp or on road trips with her family, touring and hiking national parks. She credits these early, formative experiences with making her a “nature kid.”

In a recent interview, Price remarked that she loves “storytelling around environmental issues in particular.” She honed this talent as a scholar and writer living in an unlikely city, not immediately known for its natural beauty — sunny, bustling Los Angeles. Perhaps more than anything, Price is concerned with detailing the relationship between nature and human experience or interference. She is the author of *Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America* (2000) and “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.,” the latter of which is included here.

In the essay that follows, Price writes, “I head for L.A.’s wild spots when I can, and delight in hawks, dolphins, and sunsets as much as the next nature lover. I have a special soft spot for ducks. But the anthologies ignore about 90 percent of the nature in L.A. and all the other places we live, as well as most people’s encounters with nature on Earth.” This, Price thinks, is one of the greatest shortfalls of modern nature writing, this lack of attention to detail, this unwillingness to illustrate the shared thread of connection between people and their natural habitats. Her work aims to right this wrong, to keep nature at the center of environmentalism, and to notice nature in all its forms and in all its locations. There is no place, even the urban environment of the largest cities, that is *without nature*.

Since earning a PhD in history from Yale University, Price has taught at several institutions in California, including UCLA and USC, as well as at Princeton University. She has been a Research Scholar at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, and presented her writing and research both within, and beyond, the academy. She cofounded the LA Urban Rangers, a public art collective, and has contributed to their projects, including Public Access 101: Downtown LA, Water Bar, and Malibu Public Beaches. Her Malibu beach work extends to a mobile app, Our Malibu Beaches, which is continuously updated to help people access and use public beaches in Malibu, a traditionally privatized



area. Other art projects include exhibitions at Cooper Hewitt, MOCA, and the Smithsonian Design Museum, and the Nature Trail at the Laumeier Sculpture Park in St. Louis.

Price's newest book project is *Stop Saving the Planet! — & Other Tips for 21st-Century Environmentalists*. In every facet of her work, Price aims to study and discuss the environment, but does so in ways that are accessible to the kinds of people who are impacted, and who impact, nature. Said another way, Price is a writer for everyone.

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Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.

We need to rewrite the stories we tell about nature, and Los Angeles is the best place to do it.

PART ONE: THE FIRST SIX WAYS AND A TRIP TO THE RIVER

DISCUSSED: *Nathanael West, Mike Davis, Raymond Chandler, Temescal Canyon, Dolphins, Hawks, Ducks, Mango Body Whips, Coyotes as Urban Terrorists, Seismic Retrofitting, Feral Peacocks, Aaron Spelling, The Concrete Straitjacket*

This other Eden, demi-paradise, this precious stone set in the silver sea, this earth, this realm, this Los Angeles.

— Steve Martin (and Shakespeare), *L.A. Story*

The entire world seems to be rooting for Los Angeles to slide into the Pacific or be swallowed by the San Andreas Fault.

— Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*

Experience the beauty...of another culture while learning more about wastewater treatment and reuse.

— Brochure for the combination water reclamation plant and Japanese garden in the San Fernando Valley

PROLOGUE: FROM WALDEN TO L.A.

There are many places in L.A. you can go to think about the city, and my own favorite has become the Los Angeles River, which looks like an outsize concrete sewer and is most famous for being forgotten. The L.A. River flows fifty-one miles through the heart of L.A. County. It is enjoying herculean efforts to revitalize it, and yet commuters who have driven over it five days a week for ten years cannot tell you where it is. Along the river, the midpoint lies roughly at the confluence with the Arroyo Seco, near Dodger Stadium downtown. L.A. was founded near here in 1781: this area offers the most reliable aboveground supply of freshwater in the L.A. basin. It's a miserable spot now, a trash-strewn wasteland of empty lots, steel fences, and railroad tracks beneath a tangle of freeway overpasses:

it looks like a *Blade Runner* set that a crew disassembled and then put back together wrong. It's not the most scenic spot to visit the river but may be the finest place on the river to think about L.A.

Like so many writers who come to Los Angeles — and I moved here seven years ago — I have succumbed inevitably to the siren call to write about the city. The long-established procedure has been to explore why one loves it or hates it, or both, and to proclaim loudly in the process that L.A. is the American dream or the American nightmare. The tradition tempts writers with a combination of navel-gazing and arm-waving that proves impossible to resist for too long.

Of course, I am a nature writer — a unique brand of writer that has felt no compulsion whatsoever to write about L.A. and even less to live here. Though you could toss an apple core into the bushes in Missoula, Montana, and hit a nature writer, I have found four practitioners so far among the ten million people in L.A. County, and one, my friend Bill Fox, fled to Portland for a couple of years. "Is there nature in L.A.?" people typically respond when I say I write about nature in this town. But I have ended up here happily, and Bill has just returned, exactly because L.A. has become the finest place in America to think and write about nature.

More urgently, L.A. is the ideal place to tackle the problem of *how* to write about nature. In the past twenty-five years, the venerable American literature of nature writing has become distressingly marginal. Even my nature-loving and environmentalist friends tell me they never read it. Earnest, pious, and quite allergic to irony: none of these trademark qualities plays well in 2006. But to me, the core trouble is that nature writers have given us endless paeans to the wonders of wildness since Thoreau fled to Walden Pond, but need to tell us far more about our everyday lives in the places we actually live. Perhaps you're not worrying about the failures of this literary genre as a serious problem. But in my own arm-waving manifesto about L.A. and America, I will proclaim that the crisis in nature writing is one of our most pressing national cultural catastrophes.

I love L.A. more than I hate it. I wasn't supposed to. A nature lover from suburban St. Louis, I have enjoyed a fierce and enduring attachment to the wilds of the Southern Rockies. I was supposed to love Boulder, Colorado, where I settled after graduate school in the hope that it might be the perfect place — and it's a town that every day adores itself in the mirror and confirms its perfection. But by pondering all the ways of seeing nature in L.A., I can explain why I have decided that I love L.A. instead — and why the L.A. River (site of the famous chase scenes in *Grease* and *Terminator 2*) has become my favorite place in L.A., and "Enjoy the beauty of another culture while learning more about wastewater treatment and reuse" my working motto as a nature writer. Also why so many of the best-known interpreters of L.A. as the American dream and nightmare, from Nathanael West to Raymond Chandler to Joan Didion to Mike Davis, have written obsessively about nature. Why perhaps the most

quoted lines in all the fabled L.A. literature are Chandler's passage on the gale-force autumn winds:

It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas....On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen.

And why we need to rewrite entirely the stories we tell about nature, and why L.A. is the best place to do it.

ONE WAY OF SEEING NATURE IN L.A.: AS NONEXISTENT

"Is there nature in L.A.?" The question sometimes betrays sarcasm, but sometimes not. L.A., after all, has long been decried as the Anti-Nature: it's the American megalopolis with brown air, fouled beaches, pavement to the horizon, and a concrete river. It's sort of the Death Star to American nature lovers — the place from where the destruction of nature emanates — which is why woody towns like Missoula and Boulder hail themselves as the anti-L.A.

"IS THERE NATURE IN L.A.?"

And this is the reigning nature story we tell about L.A.: There is no nature here.

A SECOND WAY: AS THE WILD THINGS

But this story hews to a historically powerful definition of nature as only the wild things, which we destroy and banish when we build cities. This way to define nature — the great American nature story, and the heart and soul of nature writing — has become so firmly entrenched that seeing nature in other ways has been next to impossible.

Still, even by this inadequate definition, L.A. sports a great deal of nature: the extensive beaches, mountains, and canyons that have always brought people here. A few nature-writing anthologies include a single rogue piece about finding wildness inside a city. If L.A. *symbolizes* "the end of nature" (to use Bill McKibben's dangerously catchy phrase), it actually has more than enough real fodder for such tales, if you want to write about the sunset on Broad Beach in Malibu or the hawks soaring in Temescal Canyon or the dolphins leaping just offshore or how your heart soars like a hawk or leaps like a dolphin as you watch the sun set offshore from atop the trail in Temescal Canyon.

But there are so many more kinds of nature stories to tell here. I head for L.A.'s wild spots when I can, and delight in hawks, dolphins, and sunsets as much as the next nature lover. I have a special soft spot for ducks. But the anthologies ignore about 90 percent of the nature in L.A. and all the other places we live, as well as most of people's encounters with nature on Earth. What the crisis of nature writing amounts to, in a few words, is that Thoreau really, really needs to Get on the Bus.

And my own list of favorite representative topics for a more comprehensive, on the bus nature writing in Los Angeles would have to include mango body whips, the social geography of air, Zu-Zu the murdered Chihuahua, and Mapleton Drive near Bel Air. And, of course, the L.A. River, where all the possible kinds of nature stories in L.A. converge.

A THIRD WAY: AS THE RESOURCES WE USE

The mango body whip story begins like this: soon after I moved to L.A., a woman who ran into my car while it was parked on the USC campus left a note on the back of a receipt for a mango body whip, which she'd purchased at SkinMarket at the Beverly Center mall. What's a mango body whip? I didn't know. Skin product? More perverse? I made a trip to the Center, and found out that it's a mango-infused thick and buttery skin cream.

Nature stories abound in such an encounter. Begin with the mangoes. Follow them, and you can tell an intricate set of stories as farm workers harvest mangoes in rural Mexico, and drivers truck them into the L.A. area and into the SkinMarket factory in Simi Valley — just over the L.A. County line — where workers use industrial technologies to turn them into skin butter, and distributors transport them to upscale malls like the Beverly Center, and shoppers cart them away to bathrooms in adjacent Beverly Hills and West Hollywood and to other places throughout the country.

Mango body whip stories, in other words, look for and follow the nature we use, and watch it move in and out of the city, to track specifically how we transform natural resources into the mountains of stuff with which we literally build cities and sustain our urban lives. These tales might track nature through cars. They could be about soap or magazines. They can look for the nature in refrigerators, sushi, dog food, TVs, linguine, baseball caps, closet organizers, digital cameras, bracelets, concert halls, laptop computers, bicycles. If you tell stories that follow nature through our material lives, you will see a lot of L.A. — the city's warehouses, factories, commercial strips, and cultural centers, and its residential neighborhoods, some of which have a great deal more stuff than others.

A FOURTH WAY: AS DIFFERENT TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Which brings me to the social geography of air. The air in L.A., if polluted, is not equally polluted everywhere. The coastal and mountain areas, which tend to be the wealthiest, enjoy the cleanest air on average. On the inland flats, the poorest, least white, and most industrial neighborhoods in L.A. suffer the worst air, along with alarming asthma rates. Another way to put it is that the Angelenos who work in and live near the factories that manufacture mango body whips breathe far more polluted air than the residents who are most likely to be the body whip devotees. I live on Venice Beach, near Ozone Avenue — named without irony in the clean-air early 1900s, but still one of the safest places to breathe in L.A. County. Twenty miles inland, the Southeast L.A. area — the most industrialized

urban area in the U.S., with many of L.A.'s lowest-income and most heavily Latino neighborhoods — occupies 1 percent of the county by acreage but generates 18 percent of the toxic air emissions.

While mango body whip stories follow nature as resources through L.A., geography of air tales narrate who encounters what nature where. These tales begin with “who.” They ask, importantly, who benefits most and who suffers the worst consequences as who uses and transforms nature. But they also ask who eats what foods and who doesn’t, and who plants what in their gardens, and who lives nearest and farthest away from a city’s parks, and who hunts and fishes or watches birds, and who chooses parrots or pit bulls or rabbits or goldfish as pets. This brand of tale asks how different people encounter nature differently.

Nature writing has ignored these third and fourth ways of seeing. It has been a literary universe in which we visit and contemplate wild nature, but seldom use and transform nature: when the mango becomes a mango body whip, it ceases to be nature, as does the oil in a laptop computer or a maple tree that becomes a table. And the genre describes nature as a unitary force or kind of place that Man encounters, and where we’ll find universal meanings — but seldom something you encounter from a specific social position and point of view.

But such a way of seeing can fully explain exactly no encounter with nature in 2006, whether in a wilderness area, on a farm, or at the Beverly Center mall. I love to go hiking on the vast trail network here in the Santa Monica Mountains. Sure, that’s a typical nature story in which I seek refuge and simplicity and quiet in L.A.’s wilds as antidote to the stress and noise of my daily life. But to narrate *all* the encounters with nature that define my hike,

I also have to ask where the natural resources in my Gore-tex shell and hiking boots come from — the oil, stone, metals, and animal skins in my twenty-first-century hiker gear, which keeps me warm and dry and makes my closet look like an REI outlet. How do they connect me to the global transformation of nature? And how do they shape my experience of hiking? The Simple Life out in nature is complex as hell. I’d also have to narrate how wealthier Angelenos are more likely to live near L.A.’s mountain parks — and to own cars to get to them. And how does the particular work I do at a desk all week make a strenuous weekend hike sound like a good idea in the first place? The hike has to be a story about how our connections to one another define our encounters with nature. And it’s about how the National Park Service in the Santa Monica Mountains has chosen my favorite trail routes, and how they manage fire suppression, and how they draw up hundreds of rules and policies to keep both the visitors and the parklands happy.

A FIFTH WAY: AS LANDSCAPE AND ECOLOGY WE BUILD IN AND MANAGE

Which brings me to Zu-Zu the murdered Chihuahua. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, Zu-Zu’s story begins, or ends, like this: In summer

2002, a coyote entered the yard of a casting director in the Silver Lake area west of Downtown and ate her Chihuahua, Zu-Zu. Coyotes, her husband warned bitterly, are “urban terrorists”: the bereft owner said, “I have no liberty in my front yard.” A letter to the *Times*, though, lionized the coyote as the real victim, an indigenous animal encroached on by evil yippy Chihuahuas (if, like me, you tend to agree, then try substituting a Labrador retriever puppy for Zu-Zu).

When you bring domestic dogs into a landscape of native animals, then the resident carnivores are likely to see the pets as prey. When you use and change a landscape, then the place will respond. Nature is never passive. Every place has an active, very particular ecology, climate, topog-

**WHEN YOU USE AND CHANGE A
LANDSCAPE, THEN THE PLACE WILL
RESPOND. NATURE IS NEVER PASSIVE.**

raphy, geology, flora, fauna. Zu-Zu stories narrate how we change places and how they respond and how we respond back and so on and so on. They’re about paving, building, planting, bulldozing, fires and fire

suppression, polluting and cleaning up, pet keeping and coyote predations, earthquakes and seismic retrofitting, water supply and flood management, and sewers and gas lines and lawns and gardens and roads and trails and parks.

Nature writers have in fact told this kind of story — usually, however, with an evil Chihuahua moral, in which Man stomps into nature primeval and ravages and desacralizes it. But as guidance for how we can inhabit places, seeing people inevitably as invaders in these stories works about as well as branding coyotes as terrorists. An “evil Chihuahua” moral demands that we leave the nature we live in as it is (in which case we’ll die), but a “terrorist coyote” moral urges us to eradicate nature (in which case we’ll die). Neither approach helps us navigate *how* to keep pet animals in a landscape with native predators — or how to make a road or build a house or ensure a water supply or figure out how to keep the air and water clean. Ideally, Zu-Zu stories should help us ask how we can create livable and sustainable cities. They should be deeply informed by knowledge of the ecology, geology, and natural history of the place. They should help us walk the essential line between doing nothing in nature and doing whatever we want. Like mango body whip tales, they should seek to understand what our connections to nature actually are so that we can think about what our connections should look like.

These are a few topics the *Los Angeles Times* has reported on in recent months: water deals in the West, discarded American computers shipped to China, dog parks, an L.A. landfill in the Mojave desert, the hybrid Toyota Priuses, diesel pollution in industrial south L.A., battles against new developments in the outer suburbs, new parks on the L.A. River, high silicosis rates among Chinese trinket-factory workers, oil refineries in Venezuela, farmer’s markets, the best restaurants for peach dishes, sustainable water-use practices in Santa Monica, toxic plastics residues in polar bears in the Arctic, neighborhood lawn regulations,

the fight over removing the feral peacocks who scream every morning in the Palos Verdes neighborhoods, pesticides buildup in frog populations, battles for public beach access in Malibu.

These are nature topics all, about how we live in and fight about nature, and about how we use it more and less fairly and sustainably, and about the enormous consequences for our lives in L.A., as well as for places and people and wildlife everywhere. And such topics beg for a literature — for a poetry, for an aesthetics — because to clearly ponder our lives in and out of cities, we have to be able to imagine and reimagine these connections to nature.

A SIXTH WAY: AS A PREMIER SOURCE OF HUMAN MEANING

Imagine the site of Los Angeles County four thousand years ago. The people who lived here — the ancestors of the Tongva, the Chumash, the Tataviam — used birds and deer to make food and clothes, and turned trees into shelter, and turned water, rocks, and dirt into energy, tools, boats, medicine, religious objects, art. (And in 2006 B.C.E., connections to nature were not all that simple either.) The people used and changed nature in order to live. They told stories about nature to explain the world and to guide their actions within it.

What do we do in Los Angeles now? Essentially the same thing. We use nature and tell stories about it to live and explain our lives. To use nature is to be human: that's a pretty fair working definition. To tell stories is to be a human explaining how things work. The stories that any people tell about nature are some of the most basic stories they tell. *Is there nature in L.A.?* The fact that the major nature story we tell in L.A., as in all cities, is that there is no nature here does not make this tale any less basic, powerful, or telling.

How do we make nature meaningful? "What nature means" tales are one last category of story I'll suggest, and nature writing has shown great interest in this kind of story — in fact the quest for meaning has defined the genre's very soul. Of course, nature writers have attached various meanings to a great range of places, animals, and plants. Yosemite? Majesty. A sacred place. The desert? Peace. Harshness. Clarity. Songbirds? Beauty. Delicacy. Earthquakes? Fury and vengeance. Water? A metaphor for life. But nature? The ur-meaning that frames all others? Wildness. Not-us-ness. The anti-modern. A place apart. Salvation. Refuge. And this ur-meaning historically has reigned as an exceptionally powerful American cultural assumption. Nature writing has preached it tenaciously, but hardly invented this way of seeing and of refusing to see. The vision of wild nature as counterpoint to a corrupted modern civilization has always played a central role in American national myths and identity. (Think City on a Hill, the mythic frontier, a hundred years of Westerns, and landscape photography.) To define nature as the wild things apart from cities is one of the great fantastic American stories.

And it's one of the great fantastic American denials. On Mapleton Drive in Holmby Hills in the Bel Air area, in the Santa Monica Mountain foothills, the TV producer Aaron Spelling has built what's widely publicized as the starship of Hollywood homes — a 56,550-square-foot French limestone mansion with 123 rooms, with two rooms for wrapping gifts and a rose garden on top of one of four garages. Here are two generally ignored facts about Spelling's famous homestead. First, it is a house of nature: Spelling built it, has maintained it, and stocks it with fantastic quantities of oil, stone, metals, dirt, water, and wood (a likely forest's worth of wrapping paper, to begin with). And second, there are very few maples on Mapleton Drive. Maybe maples grew here in abundance once, and maybe not. Either way, the street enjoys the *idea* of maple trees, which conjures a bucolic refuge above the smog, noise, and torrential activity of the megalopolis below. Call it maple mojo. Smaller manses of nature line the rest of Mapleton Drive as well as the neighboring streets Parkwood, Greendale, Brooklawn, Beverly Glen. No parks, no woods, no dales, no brooks, no glens. Just the mojo of wild nature.

Mapleton Drive showcases the denial intrinsic to the great American nature story. To say there's no nature in cities is a convenient way of seeing if I like being a nature lover and environmentalist but don't want to give up any of my stuff. We cherish nature as an *idea* of wildness while losing track of the real nature in our very houses. We flee to wild nature as a haven from high-tech industrial urban life, but refuse to see that we madly use and transform wild nature to sustain the exact life from which we seek retreat. We make sacred our encounters with wild nature but thereby desecrate all other encounters. Or in other words, if we cannot clearly understand cities and our lives within them unless we keep track of our connections to nature, still there may be some basic things we prefer not to see and understand.

Ideally, if there's any one argument I could persuade you of, it's that our foundational nature stories should see and cherish our mundane, economic, utilitarian, daily encounters with nature — so that what car you drive and how you get your water and how you build a house should be transparent acts that are as sacred as hiking to the top of Point Mugu in the northern Santa Monica Mountains and gazing out over the Pacific Ocean to watch the dolphins leap, the ducks float, and the sun set. True, there's a lovely yearning in the American vision of nature as a wild place apart — for simplicity, for a slower life. There's great wonder about the natural world, and terrific love for wild places and things. There's legitimate bewilderment, in response to the mind-boggling complexity of modern connectedness (how could I *possibly* keep track of where the nature in my Toyota wagon comes from?). There's a large dose of real regret, for the wanton destructiveness of toxic industrialism and excessive consumerism. And there's powerful, overriding denial, in the service of powerful self-indulgence and material desire, that pushes us to imagine nature out of rather than into our lives.

RIVER TRIP #1

Just how powerful? Well, in L.A., enough to let us lose track of an entire river — not just the nature in the stuff in our houses. We can't find L.A.'s major waterway, which sustained L.A. for 150 years and now runs under ten gridlocked freeways through the heart of L.A. County. A fifty-one-mile river in plain sight: lost.

The L.A. River is one of the city's central natural facts. L.A. inhabits a river basin, and the major river drains large portions of three mountain ranges out to the Pacific. The L.A. Basin, while large enough for a megapolopolis, is small for that much drainage, and the L.A. River consequently poses a greater flood danger than most urban U.S. rivers. (Mark Twain wrote that he'd fallen into a Southern California river and "come out all dusty" — but apparently hadn't seen one of the raging flash floods.) In the 1930s, when a last-straw series of floods made half of L.A. canoeable, the city signed up the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who heroically proceeded to dig a concrete straitjacket for the river and all its tributaries — a twenty-five-year project that required 3.5 million barrels of concrete and remains the Corps' largest public works project west of the Mississippi. The Corps and County Public Works rechristened the river the "flood control channel." They recategorized it as infrastructure, with the freeways and electrical grid. To the public, in any case, the channel no longer looked wild enough to be a river or to count as nature at all. And this is how L.A. lost its river — not lost as in no longer had one, since L.A. actually still had it, but lost as in could no longer see or find it.

**AND THIS IS HOW L.A. LOST ITS
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If a city is built and sustained through using, managing, and imagining nature, then however you see and manage your central natural facts should have massive citywide consequences. What happens when you deny that your river is a river?

The saga of the concrete L.A. River plays out as every brand of nature story. First, a "what nature means" tale: Angelenos reimagined the river as nonexistent, and banished it from their collective imagination of history and place. Also, a tale of wild things. Many birds and frogs continued to use the river (they apparently hadn't received the memo that it was no longer a river), but other birds and most fish species did disappear, along with extensive wetlands and riparian habitat.

Also, a Zu-Zu story. As Los Angeles altered the Southern California landscape to control the river's floods, we largely ignored the basic hydrological processes. The jacketed river could no longer flow out into its basin, and therefore no longer replenished the aquifer with water, the soils with nutrients, and the beaches with sand. The county designed the storm sewers, however, to empty *into* the channel, which promptly

turned the river into L.A.'s Grand Sewer, which gathers pesticides, motor oil, trash, dog feces, and many hundreds more pollutants from driveways, lawns, roads, and parking lots across the 834-square-mile watershed and rushes the toxins downstream into the Pacific Ocean. And yes, floodwaters have stayed safely within the concrete walls, but the extra water from the storm sewers has actually dramatically increased the volume of the river's floods.

The cement channel also constitutes L.A.'s strategy to move storm-water, that life-giving natural resource, through the city. Here is the river's mango body whip story: a city that inhabits a place on Earth with a semi-arid Mediterranean climate pours as much of the rainwater as possible, which we get from the sky for free, into the storm sewers, through the river, and into the Pacific — and then pays dearly to import water by aqueduct from up to four hundred miles away. Call it watering the ocean, by draining watersheds across the West. And finally, a social geography of air story. L.A. may have wild places, but as the American city that has so consistently privileged private property over public spaces, it also historically has set aside remarkably little public park space per capita — and L.A.'s poorest areas suffer the worst shortages of neighborhood park space, enjoy the least private green space, and lie farthest from the mountain parks. In this infamously fragmented city, the poorest neighborhoods also invariably have been the most cut up by freeways and industry. The concrete channel turned the basin's most logical site for green space, and the city's major natural connector, into an outsize open sewer that carved a no-man's-land through many of the city's most fragmented and park-starved areas.

In sum, L.A.'s errant treatment of a major natural feature has profoundly exacerbated nearly all of L.A.'s notorious troubles — environmental chaos, social inequities, community fragmentation, water shortages, water imperialism, and erasure of civic memory. The good news, on the other hand — and I'll get to the restoration efforts on the river presently — is that if you use and manage this nature more sustainably and fairly, you can make the city a healthier, more equitable, and all-around lovelier place to live in. First, though, you have to see the nature in the place. You have to find it.

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Is there nature in L.A.? Far more than our philosophies dream of, and much more than in Portland or Boulder — more, possibly, on Mapleton Drive alone than in some small towns in Iowa. One may as well ask if there is water in the ocean. To get on the bus — to imagine a more vital and comprehensive nature writing — is to deem the question plain dumb silly, along with "Where is nature?" and maybe even "What is nature?" and especially that nonsense about the end of nature, which makes only as much sense as declaring an end to rocks or air or water and bespeaks exactly the way of thinking by which L.A. lost its river. The powering question of this literature should become, rather, *What nature is it?* — and

then, How do we use nature? How do we change nature? How does nature react? How do we react back? How do we imagine nature? *Who* uses and changes and imagines nature? And often the most vital questions of all: How sustainably? How fairly? How well?

A few new methods for the old practice of using Los Angeles to think.

PART TWO: ANOTHER SEVEN WAYS AND AN ARRIVAL AT THE CONFLUENCE

DISCUSSED: *Urban Demographics, Consumerist Valhallas, Nature Writing, The American Eden, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Muggings, Suntan Lotion, Hydrology, The L.A. River Greenway, Clean Air Legislation, Nature's Revenge*

A SEVENTH WAY: AS NEARLY INFINITELY ABUNDANT

The place is rapidly... sinking into a Blade Runner dystopian futurism.... The air is unbreathable, the water undrinkable, the transit system impenetrable....

— *Time Out Los Angeles Guide*
(the guide I purchased upon moving here in 1998)

L.A. County spreads out over 4,084 square miles. It is the second largest U.S. metropolis (after New York) by size and population: more people live in the entire four-county greater Los Angeles area than in each of the least populous forty-two states. L.A. ranks as the largest U.S. industrial center and hosts the nation's busiest port. I live in a world Valhalla for wealth and consumerism. The nearly incomprehensible quantity of people's connections to nature in L.A. could mobilize a light infantry of nature writers. And all this nature is of such critical importance because these connections — how we use and move and transform nature here — entail enormous consequences for places in the U.S. and throughout the world.

There has been Walden Pond, and there have been John Muir's Yosemite and Annie Dillard's Tinker Creek and Barry Lopez's Arctic. And on the reimagined map of nature writing, there should be Los Angeles — and not just because nature is so wildly abundant here, and what happens to it so globally consequential. L.A. is also the place where the failures of our stories have played out in such exaggerated form, and where the usefulness of really seeing nature is perhaps most urgent. Because L.A. has always enjoyed an especially dramatic relationship to nature, to stories, and above all, to nature stories.

AN EIGHTH WAY: AS EXCEPTIONALLY ICONIC

Since the start of the '90s...many of us [were left] with the distinct impression that...maybe the Four Horsemen were using the L.A. basin to warm up before riding on to the actual Apocalypse.

— *Time Out Los Angeles Guide*

Has any city engendered more enthusiastic myth-mongering? In L.A.'s special, unstoppable, even psychotic tradition of storytelling, we've tended to state the powerful vision of nature as a place apart, like most grand American tales, in especially dramatic style. After all, who asks, "Is there nature in New York?" or "Is there nature in Chicago?" One might say that New York and Chicago and Pittsburgh have little nature, but L.A., we like to say, has none at all. Not one whit: L.A. has long symbolized all other cities as places where nature is not.

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Rain...usually [leaves] people stranded atop their vehicles or entombed in sinking homes.

— *The National Geographic Traveler: Los Angeles*

How have nature writers, alone in literary circles, been able to resist L.A.? It's actually quite a lot of fun to write about, even if (maybe especially if) you hate it. The glee in the excoriations is as palpable as the rapture in the paeans. New Eden, Paradise Lost, Utopia, Dystopia, City of the Second Chance, the Great Wrong Place. Since the late nineteenth century boosters marketed L.A. as the American Eden, L.A.'s interpreters have tended to declare that the City of Angels (also the City of Fallen Angels) spells the success or failure of the American dream. It's the land of economic opportunity or class warfare, ethnic diversity or racial hatred, the democracy of homeownership or the evils of suburban sprawl. Whether describing sexual liberation, environmental ruin, or soaring homicide rates, L.A. stories tend to wax dramatic about what happens here to proclaim that life in America has gone fantastically right or wrong. "It is raining in Los Angeles," the *New York Times* reported on the first fall rains in 2002: "People are dying on the highways. Planes are falling out of the sky." Can you imagine such a *Times* report about the rains in San Diego or Houston? "There's a certain kind of white, piercing empty light to the Los Angeles sky," wrote a film reviewer in *Entertainment Weekly* shortly afterward, "that can make a person want to commit suicide." And for what other city would the informational guidebooks — not just the fiction, op-eds, news coverage, and academic scholarship, as well as the weather coverage and traffic reports — describe the place as a staging ground for the apocalypse?

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Near the [Santa Monica] Pier, the potential for getting mugged [is] almost as good as that for getting a tan.

— *Fodor's upclose Los Angeles*

The oft cited refrains “American dream” and “American nightmare” can set eyes rolling in Los Angeles itself. In reality, planes do not tumble from the sky and people do not head for their car roofs when it rains here, and you could spend years and a small fortune on sunscreen waiting to be mugged near the Santa Monica pier. L.A. is not inordinately dangerous: this is not a Gotham in dire need of a bat signal. The sprawl city does boast a plethora of great walking neighborhoods. It can be frustrating to live in such a relentlessly iconic city. But proclaiming the meaning of L.A. will not likely fade any day soon as a national pastime. You could say — to borrow a coinage from the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss — that Americans have used L.A. to think.

All of which makes L.A. an ideally resonant place to challenge the established American nature story, which imagines nature in opposition to cities — and we eye-rollers in L.A. have long been calling for new stories with which to imagine this city. If Los Angeles is really a city of nature, then all other cities must be nature, too.

A NINTH WAY: AS A CASUALTY OF A BROADER REFUSAL TO SEE CONNECTIONS

Imagination is all that finally defines L.A.

— Michael Ventura, *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, 2000

Really? Nothing but imagination? Of course, if the real L.A. doesn't always match up to the dramatic parables, these stories have tended to exaggerate more than to make things up. As the city with measurably more sprawl, pollution, ethnic diversity, economic inequality, and homicide than most other cities, L.A. has always tended to push all things American — our trends, ideals, and narratives — to the outer edge, and has pushed few things farther than an ideal of personal freedom. I encounter a salute to this ideal approximately weekly: in the weeks before I wrote this, an L.A. architectural historian told the *Los Angeles Times* that “you have a sense of freedom here that you don't have anywhere else in the United States,” and a TV reviewer wrote in the New York — based *Entertainment Weekly* that L.A. is “the land of reinventing yourself, of discovering new possibilities, new realities, new fantasies.” L.A. has shone as the fabled city where you can start over, cut loose from social constraints, and escape your past. As the astute L.A. writer David Ulin remarked in the *Times* about a commemoration of the 1994 earthquake: “[It is] expected to be the kind of event that doesn't usually happen in Los Angeles, a conscious effort to link the present to the past.” In the city that so often exaggerates American trends and narratives, you can most clearly watch the association of the American dream with private desire and a willful blindness to connections.

You have an inalienable right to make your real life conform to your dream life.

— *CityTripping Los Angeles*

L.A. is notoriously short on parks and other public spaces. It is a stronghold of the gated neighborhood. L.A. ranks first among U.S. cities for the number of millionaires and forty-first in philanthropy. *Forty-first*. Here, you can so clearly observe the tendency — magnified in my adopted town but hardly unique to it — to confuse ideals of personal liberty with an ideal of being free to accumulate capital and use it to do whatever you want. You can watch the failure to ballast the quest for individual freedom with other, long-standing American-dream ideals of equality and community. This is the land of Prop. 13 and Prop. 187, where affluent Angelenos want the cheapest labor but no social services for the illegal immigrants who do it; and want the economic as well as cultural benefits of an ethnically and racially diverse city, but don't want the diversity in their own neighborhoods; and want private canyons and beaches but expect the public to pay for the inevitable fires and mudslides; and want to commute in fabulously fuel-inefficient cars from enormous houses with forty-three-inch TVs and five bathrooms in remote canyons, but object to smog and traffic and pollution and, above all, to living anywhere near the industry and manufacture that bathroom fixtures, SUVs, and forty-three-inch TVs require. The point is that here you can watch the denial so intrinsic to the great American nature story play out as part of the larger desire to benefit from the innumerable ties to people and nature that sustain one's life in the city, and yet refuse to make good on those connections.

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L.A. is the city in me, the city I weave together for myself.

—Leo Brady, *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, 2002

Of course, this enchantment with freedom is all very beguiling, and for at least some reasons that are less ignoble than admirable. I live on Venice Beach, after all, and in defense of L.A., I love living in a place where you can rollerblade in a thong at the beach (whether male or female) while strumming a guitar. You can order a hot dog topped with pastrami, chili, and American cheese and wrapped in a tortilla. And I love that L.A. is the sort of place where a friend once began a story, "I went to Terry's house, and there was Terry, and Terry's baby, and the baby's doula, and the doula's chimp in a dress." I appreciate the greater ethnic integration, diversity of lifestyles, and flourishing of experimental arts. I have found social and career circles to be gratifyingly more porous than in other places I have lived.

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[L.A.'s]...best feature is...[that] it does not oppress its citizens with a civic identity.

-- Robert Lloyd, *L.A. Weekly*, 2001

But "individual freedom," like all grand ideals, is perilously malleable and can serve a range of agendas. And the conviction that it should mean you can do whatever the hell you want cannot possibly have found more extreme expression than in the traditional refrain here that L.A. is, in reality, exactly whatever you want it to be. It's "all imagination," "the city in me," and "your dream life." Even well-respected critics and writers repeat this shibboleth with astonishing frequency. L.A., so this popular L.A. story goes, is not just a place where we've liked to *tell* stories. It *is* a story. Literally. And it's your story, no less, your own home movie. And this pushes the ideal of individual liberty well beyond the outer edge. It's the American dream on a shooting rampage. If one could expressly design a way of seeing a city to bless people who don't want to be accountable, this would be it: to say a place is yours to design and define authorizes you to deny all your connections to people, nature, and the past. It palpates with that same potent amalgam of yearning and self-indulgence as the American nature story, which seeks salvation in nature. Out There but refuses to see how we use and transform nature in the city.

In L.A., you can most clearly watch the established American nature tale plug into a family of sins committed in the name of the American dream.

**IN L.A., YOU CAN MOST CLEARLY
WATCH THE ESTABLISHED
AMERICAN NATURE TALE PLUG INTO
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A TENTH WAY: AS ESPECIALLY DANGEROUS TO LOSE TRACK OF

On the other hand, you can also see the consequences so clearly. Whether or not you acknowledge your connections to people and nature, they of course remain operable. Go ahead and ignore your topography, your climate, your hydrology. The air will darken, the mountains will slough mud into your houses, and the lost river will gather toxics and trash. L.A. is *not* "all imagination." It has never been "your dream life," so watch out for the blowback — for smog, mud, freeway gridlock, racial violence, poverty, homelessness, beach erosion, sewage spills, severe water pollution, and the fact that the rest of the West hates you for hoarding their water supplies. Of course, most of these problems will create by far the most havoc for the city's poorer residents. Wealthy Angelenos, who benefit the most from ignoring our vital connections, also can use their wealth to evade or compensate for the consequences.

This city's most infamous problems themselves constitute an argument, as large as Los Angeles itself, that our basic stories about nature should refuse to lose track.

AN ELEVENTH WAY: AS A TERRIFIC BOON TO BOULDER AND MISSOULA

None of which is to let Boulder off the hook. In fact, very much the opposite. We may wish away connections in L.A., but we can hardly wish

away culpability for the ensuing troubles (and even affluent Angelenos encounter serious daily havoc). Boulder bills itself as the anti-L.A.: it's the green place, the socially just haven, the great right town. But how much easier is it to keep your air clean when the factories that manufacture your SUVs and Gore-Tex jackets lie in other, distant towns? And you can minimize racial and class confrontations when your own population is white and affluent, while the poor and nonwhite labor force that sustains your city's material life resides safely far away. Nature writers have documented how cities mine the hinterlands ruthlessly for raw natural resources. But they've declined to tell us almost anything about how the largest urban regions, and especially the poorer areas within them, disproportionately shoulder the burden of transforming nature to create all our lovely wondrous stuff.

Boulder couldn't begin to be the town that Boulder adores without L.A. (and an abundance of other places globally like L.A.) — just as Bel Air and Malibu couldn't be Bel Air and Malibu in their undeniable glory without their essential connections to the nature and labor throughout L.A. County. Think of a defining difference between Boulder and L.A. as the difference between Malibu and Southeast L.A. but writ nationally. Boulderites benefit proportionately more and suffer far less from how they use nature — which I suspect is one reason why Boulder never claimed my head or heart. L.A. may be a land of troubles, but also gets so unfairly maligned, because being the great right place is much too easy when you don't have to live with a lot of the problems you create.

Which is oddly heartening, because the City of Angels feels like a distinctly honest place to seek and write about nature. And it's a thunderously consequential place to do something about the troubles.

A TWELFTH WAY: AS A FOCUS OF GREAT GOOD WORK

And so many people are doing exactly that. The exorbitant social and environmental costs of losing track of nature have consistently confronted this megalopolis with the desperate need to pay attention. As a St. Louis friend who's an environmental lawyer has said enviously, California generally is "light years ahead of the curve on environmental regulation" — due in no small part to tackling L.A.'s problems. And L.A. itself has emerged in the last decade as a hotbed for the conviction that to make cities more livable and more equitable, we have to move nature through them more equitably and sustainably.

The American city with the worst air pollution enforces the strictest air-quality regulations, which include pioneering emissions standards for vehicles, outdoor appliances, and household products. Southern California also suffers the worst coastal pollution from storm water runoff, with one-third of all beach closures in the U.S. So NRDC, Heal the Bay, and Santa Monica Baykeeper sued the EPA, and in 1999 won a landmark legal victory that, for the first time, requires a metropolitan area to adhere to clean-up schedules mandated by the 1972 Clean Water Act.

Public agencies, environmental nonprofits, and universities have been pioneering strategies to reclaim phased-out industrial lands in the city that's long held the national title for least park space per capita. In the metropolis that suffers both extreme environmental ruin and polar social and economic inequities, environmental justice activists, including Communities for a Better Environment and Mothers of East L.A., have won nationally recognized battles in the poorer areas of east and south L.A. to shut down polluters. These groups have also waged successful, groundbreaking campaigns to force state and county regulatory agencies to recognize that air pollution and park-space shortages bedevil poorer and nonwhite neighborhoods disproportionately. And there can be no more cutting-edge place to work for urban transformation than on the banks of the country's most degraded urban river.

L.A. may not be the greenest, cleanest place to be a nature writer, but it is exciting. As *L.A. Weekly* writer Judith Lewis has put it: "Los Angeles has... [given] me a world to battle as much as I revel in it. It has given me a life in interesting times."

RIVER TRIP NO. 2

You almost need special glasses to see the L.A. River as the healthy, verdant river that the hundreds of people who are revitalizing it are aiming for. The project will take at least several decades to realize entirely — you also need great reserves of faith and patience — but it will happen if the political will and economic resources continue to flow.

In the mid-1980s, the first calls to revitalize the river, by the artist and writer Lewis MacAdams and his fledgling Friends of the L.A. River, were met with "River? What river?" FoLAR made Willy Wonka's schemes and hopes for his chocolate factory sound practical. At the time, proposals to paint the concrete blue and to use the channel as a dry-season freeway for trucks received far more serious consideration than FoLAR's ideas. After a decade of persuasion, their vision would prove to have been superb common sense before its time. And in the last five years, the river's revival has emerged as a major policy priority, as every imaginably relevant public and private interest — from Heal the Bay, neighborhood associations, and Latino social activists to the mayor's office, L.A. City Council, and the L.A. County Department of Public Works (our quondam Sun Gods of the river as infrastructure) — has concluded that revitalizing L.A.'s major river will help them ameliorate the city's worst troubles.

How *do* you resurrect the river? You have to green the banks. You have to clean the water. And you have to dynamite out some of the concrete. And each of these goals, it turns out, quickly becomes an act of thinking big.

To green the banks, this loose coalition of players has set out to turn the cement scar through the heart of this fragmented, park-starved metropolis into a fifty-one-mile greenway and bikeway, which ideally would serve as the backbone for a countywide greenway network. The Los Angeles River Greenway now consists of two dozen new parks on the

ground and many more on paper, and will green and connect many of L.A.'s poorest, and most park-poor, neighborhoods.

To clean up this outsize sewer — which by law (after the NRDC lawsuit) the EPA must now ensure happens by 2013 — you can't just extract the kilotons of pollutants after they enter the river. You have to think about where all the pollutants come from: the weed killers, insecticides, fertilizers, paints, detergents, gasoline, motor oil, car waxes, and countless more toxic everyday products in the basic city-America-2006 street stew that washes into our soil, our water, and eventually our bodies. Alas, the city has spent more time fighting the legal ruling than the pollutants. But to clean the river, L.A. will absolutely have to mandate cleaner industrial processes to manufacture products that are themselves less toxic, more recyclable, more biodegradable.

You have to blow up some of the concrete, if not every last ton: the Seine, after all, runs through Paris in a cement channel. Blast it today, however, and the next heavy winter rains could submerge the Staples Center and Union Station. Rather, before you enjoy the thought of dynamite, you have to dramatically reduce the amount of water that flows down the river during storms. To do that, the river revitalizers propose to divert floodwaters into large basins that can double as parks and wetlands. Even more important, though, they aim to capture as much rain as possible where it falls, rather than rush it into the river to water the Pacific. To do *that*, Public Works has launched pilot projects to use porous paving, to unpave schoolyards, and to retrofit gutters, freeway medians, and parking lots to pitch water into the ground instead of the storm sewers. You can store the water in underground cisterns and use it on-site — say, to water your lawn — or you can let it drain into the ground and replenish the aquifer (where it'll clean itself up as minerals in the soil bind up toxic chemicals).

Altogether, restoring the river to health would improve water quality, control flooding, and restore wildlife habitat. Neighborhoods throughout L.A. would acquire much-needed park and green space. It would enhance local water supplies dramatically, and so would potentially change how water moves through the West. All the new greenery would help clean the air. The project has pushed L.A. to the national forefront of urban watershed management. It's made the river a meeting ground for Angelenos' broader efforts to enhance the equity and environmental quality of life in Los Angeles. And by reviving a premier symbol of urban destruction, it could make just about anything imaginable in urban transformation. A healthy L.A. River wouldn't be quite as wondrous as the chocolate factory, but it would be close.

A THIRTEENTH WAY: AS THE FOUNDATION OF L.A. STORIES

*This is a happy land for children and all young animals...They live
in the pure air and sunshine.*

— *Health Seekers' [and] Tourists'... Guide to the...
Pacific Coast, 1884*

The palm trees were high with scrawny fronds like broken pinwheels ... and a droopy ice plant could never quite hold the earth...in place... and an oil derrick [looked] like a rusty praying mantis, trying to suck the last few barrels out of the dying crabgrass.

— Robert Towne, on researching his 1974 *Chinatown* script

And waiting in the wings are the plague squirrels and killer bees.

— Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, 1998

The river's revival, just like its ruin, plays out as every category of nature story. But the stories are beginning to sound better. The wild-things tales are about trying to create healthy rivers and wetlands, and the mango-body-whip tales describe the wise use of basic natural resources. In these social-geography-of-air tales, poorer Angelenos do not get shafted. In the new Zu-Zu tales, we aim to use a wealth of knowledge about the landscape to guide how we transform it.

And the "what it means" tales should be about how we're imagining nature into the city and our daily lives. Except that we're not, mostly. Amidst all the new publicity about the river, so many Angelenos still declare that the L.A. River isn't wild enough to be "natural." Amidst all the cutting-edge environmental work in this city generally, so many people in and out of L.A. still ask, "Is there nature in L.A.?" Consider, too, that every conceivable brand of environmental advocate, from ecologists and environmentalists to urban planners and landscape architects to policy wonks and politicians and environmental historians, have all been paying a great deal of attention to urban nature — and yet nature writers continue to shun cities as Gomorrahs of iniquitous conspiracies against the natural world (to overstate the case, but only a bit). And as every other literary genre in the last 150 years has exploded with every wild experiment and philosophy imaginable, nature writing alone has remained comparatively unchanged. Unfortunately, the great fantastic American nature story may prove more resistant to any calls to blow it up than the concrete in the L.A. River.

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To watch the front-page news out of Los Angeles during a Santa Ana is to get very close to what it is about the place.

— Joan Didion, *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*, 1968

And nowhere has this powerful tale been rooted more tenaciously than in Los Angeles. And here is the last, and perhaps the ultimate, reason that nature writers should flock to L.A. as the logical headquarters to rewrite this tale: L.A., like no other city, has woven this story so thoroughly into stories about the city itself. From the nineteenth-century boosters to the popular *Land of Sunshine* magazine in the early 1900s to Raymond Chandler and Nathanael West in the 1930s and '40s to Didion to Mike Davis to the current coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*, L.A.'s interpreters have been obsessed with sea, sun, winds, sky, and palm

trees, as well as fire, mud, earthquakes, plague squirrels, and killer bees. And even Davis — from whom I have learned so much about how to see Los Angeles — imagines nature in opposition to cities.

Consider the American dream and nightmare stories. To simplify egregiously, these dominant L.A. narratives really parse into three kinds of tales — dream, nightmare, and apocalypse — that have coexisted since at least the 1930s but have progressed roughly in dominance in that order. In the beginning, L.A. was the American Eden: it was the land of eternal sunshine, healthful sea breezes, and amazingly fertile soils. The late-nineteenth-century boosters lauded the virtues of wild nature to market L.A. as a sort of noncity city. L.A. was supposed to be an Anglo refuge where you could escape the industrial pollution, ethnic and racial conflicts, and financial disappointments in cities to the east — and the ensuing dream stories would continue to use fabulous paeans to sun and sea and air to frame idyllic visions of urban escape, from the post-World War II garden suburbs to today's canyon living in Malibu and the Hollywood Hills.

And then, the nightmare: the black sky, the fouled sea, the endless pavement, the dying palm trees, the concrete river. By the 1960s, as L.A. defaults on its promises of escape and pushes the problems of American cities to extremes, the Paradise Lost tales invariably invoke the utter destruction of nature to describe a city in which *everything* has gone wrong. And after the nightmare, the millennium: "Is the City of Angels Going to Hell?" *Time* asks in a 1993 cover story. In the early 1990s, L.A. reels from the Northridge earthquake, Malibu fires, mudslides, race riots, El Niño, and the O. J. Simpson trial. And the city that destroyed nature and everything else becomes the city where nature roared back for revenge. Apocalypse stories make the opposition of nature to cities decidedly literal.

**NATURE BLESSES L.A. NATURE FLEES
L.A. AND NATURE RETURNS ARMED.**

The history of L.A. storytelling, if more complicated, still basically boils down to a trilogy. Nature blesses L.A. Nature flees L.A. And nature returns armed.

In other words, no wonder I love L.A. This city has been hosting an obsessive conversation about nature for 150 years — or about as far back as when Thoreau camped out on Walden Pond. Nature stories have been more than key L.A. stories. They've been *the* L.A. stories. They're the driving stories in the city we use to think. It's ironic, isn't it? Los Angeles, which symbolizes the city as antinature, really has long flourished as a mecca for thinking and writing about nature, and for telling this powerful story in particular that nature writing has so dedicatedly perpetuated.

Which makes perfect sense, if you think about it. In the modern United States, as in any human society, the stories we tell about nature are the most basic stories we can tell. L.A. has long been a place where we articulate grand American narratives. So it should not surprise us either that the foundational L.A. story is, what? — a nature story — or that

we've told a wildly evasive nature tale to describe a city that's pushed the evasion of accountability to people and nature to an extreme. The dream tales have assured us that L.A. is a city of nature where you can escape the social and environmental troubles of cities. The destruction of nature in the nightmare tales — how can you fix something that no longer exists? — laments the city's troubles while assuring us that we don't have to do anything because the problems are beyond repair. And how much further past salvation could a city be that awaits imminent millennial annihilation by nature? Here is a city where we've dreamt brilliantly of virtue while doing spectacularly unvirtuous things. It practically vibrates with brilliant denial in the service of spectacular yearning, self-interest, and material indulgence. And the city's definitive story is a way of seeing nature that allows for and encourages these exact evasions.

What we need in L.A., as elsewhere, is a foundational literature that imagines nature not as the opposite of the city but as the basic stuff of modern everyday life. Less apocalypse, more mango body whips. Less maple mojo, more actual maple trees. We could use a great deal less "It is raining in Los Angeles. Planes are falling out of the sky," and a lot more tales that explore our daily, intertwined connections to nature and to each other — such as "Enjoy the beauty of another culture while learning more about wastewater treatment and reuse."

I love that L.A. has been a uniquely powerful place to tell American nature stories. But as long as L.A. has been a mecca for American stories, writers have been calling for new stories with which to see the city. And nature stories have to be the logical place to start.

POSTSCRIPT: THE CONFLUENCE

After I found the L.A. River, a year after I moved to L.A., I went searching for the confluence with the Arroyo Seco: the area where L.A. was founded, and the rough center of the river and the L.A. basin watershed. You cannot be surprised to hear that this spot can prove almost impossibly difficult to find. Even in the *Thomas Guide*, the bible of maps for finding one's way around Los Angeles, the blue line of the Arroyo peters out about a mile above where the two concrete channels do actually meet.

The day I found the river remains one of my finest days in L.A. I was looking for birds, so I visited three short stretches where the Corps had left a soft riverbed: a flood control basin near the headwaters; an eight-mile piece in the middle, where the water table rises so close to the surface that it would punch through concrete; and the three miles of tidal estuary at the mouth. I started upstream in the San Fernando Valley, on the sole half mile that doesn't have any concrete at all. I continued downstream to the middle stretch above Downtown, which boasts an inspired new string of pocket parks with native vegetation and outdoor sculptures. Both stretches teemed with herons, ducks, coots, and other birds. Far downstream, in Southeast L.A., the channel widens to the girth of a freeway, and I ended the day looking out over the river from atop a thirty-foot wall.

Scores of black-necked stilts picked their way around upturned shopping carts. A mallard shot down the swift current, and swallows sliced the air. The sun set spectacularly to the southwest through power lines, billboards, and the smokestacks of the L.A. Harbor. A man on a horse rode by, wearing a cowboy hat, a Mexican blanket, and a cell phone. "This is L.A.," I thought. I was steeped so contentedly in the Complex Life. All day I had been marveling, "There's a river in L.A., a real river, what do you know," and it seemed, after a year of loving L.A. but not knowing why, and of wanting to write about L.A. but not knowing what, that I was now looking at the place (duck-filled, no less) that held the key to both.

With urban designer and L.A. River aficionado Alan Loomis, I lead informal tours of the river — for friends, and their friends too, who like to think about L.A. and who have heard L.A. has a river and want to see it. We walk around the new parks, but we also insist on a stop at the Confluence, which I located at last on my own third try. We wander among the trash and muck, and skirt the homeless tents, and lean against the massive pylons of the freeway overpasses. Here, we say, lies at once the most hopeless and the most hopeful spot on the L.A. River. The geographic, historic, and ecological center of the river, the Confluence is perhaps the most extreme testament to L.A.'s erasure of nature, community, and the past. This spot is at once the logical nexus for the proposed fifty-one-mile Los Angeles River Greenway. Indeed, the city has broken ground on the first half acre of what should, eventually, become a grand central-city park. Here, we say, is one of the finest places to think about the river, which has to be one of the best places to think about L.A. — and L.A. historically has been one of the most powerful places to tell stories about America. You are standing, we allow, at an American narrative vortex. This spot ideally should be swarming with Angelenos, with writers, with nature writers. And to our delight, the people on the tours say, "What a cool place." They take a great many photographs — more, usually, than at any other stop — and then we continue downstream to imagine the future of L.A. and the Los Angeles River Greenway at a place where you can drive into the river Downtown.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Return to Price's piece, paying particular attention to its form. What is the usefulness of packaging an essay in this list, or series of vignettes? What is lost when writing this way? How would your experience reading this essay change if it were written, instead, as a series of poems? A piece of creative nonfiction? A traditional academic essay?
2. Through her work and interviews, Price repeatedly emphasizes both the importance of keeping nature centered in our studies of environmentalism and of examining the relationship between humans and nature. Who do you imagine is Price's audience for this piece? What is her argument? Do you think she has successfully reached and persuaded this target audience?

Why or why not? Use evidence from this text to support your reasoning. Has she reached or persuaded you? Why or why not?

3. In "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," Price often uses rhetorical questions. Return to this piece, keeping an eye out for these moments, and marking them accordingly. Why do you think Price leans so heavily on this device? As a reader, how do you respond to these questions? Could Price have made the same points with declarative sentences? Why or why not?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. One way to view and understand a piece of writing is to think about what you might describe as a writer's area of expertise. For example, Price refers to herself as a "nature writer." She spends a good deal of time in her essay detailing things you are likely *not* to know. In this way, most writers could be seen as having expertise that allow them to convince us or move us in a particular direction or in a specific way. Write an essay in which you consider the question of expertise in Price's essay. What is Price an expert in? What seems explicit about this expertise? What things do you think she could also be consider an "expert" in that are less explicit? Once you've detailed how you understand the role expertise plays in Price's essay, spend some time thinking more broadly about expertise and writing. What, for you as a writer, is the relationship between expertise and writing? How does Price's essay (or your own experience as a writer) trouble the notion that writers are experts? How does this help you think about your own goals and moves as a writer?
2. Price's title, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," sets up the form of her essay as a numbered list in which each number corresponds with a way of seeing and also serves as a section title (for example, "One Way of Seeing Nature in L.A.: As Nonexistent"). Study the form of Price's essay. Reread the essay making notes about its structure, its moves, and its form. Make a list of moves and formal decisions a writer would have to make if they were going to learn to write the way that Price writes in this particular essay.

Once you have a good sense of the form and a list of five or six things you think a writer would need to do to write a piece like this one, try your hand at doing so. Begin with the title: "Thirteen Ways of Seeing _____ in _____." Your essay need not model Price's in terms of the content. Your essay can be about anything that interests you. You could focus on place like Price does (for example, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Water in Kansas") or you might choose to focus on a subject entirely unlike Price's (for example, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Popular Music in American Culture"). Whatever you decide, you will want your essay to stylistically sound like Price's. You'll want to use the numbered list in the same way Price does. You'll want to learn (through the writing itself) what the strengths and intricacies of this kind of essay are, and what this form allows for or makes difficult.

3. In the opening to her piece, Price writes about the Los Angeles River as “most famous for being forgotten,” which is a surprising way of thinking about a place — a location that is both known and abandoned. Spend some time thinking about what Price means by this. Are there places in your own hometown (or a location in which you have spent some good deal of time) that you think of as “most famous for being forgotten”? Write an essay in which you take on a project like Price’s. Think of yourself as a “nature writer” writing about a specific place. What is it you’d want your readers to know or understand about this place? What can this “forgotten” location tell us about the city or town more broadly? What issues of environmental and social justice are linked to this place? And finally, just as Price considers her own place in the city of L.A., consider your place and your position in relation both to the “forgotten” location and to its context (city, town, or countryside) more broadly.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. In “Ways of Seeing,” (p. 138) John Berger, like Jenny Price in “Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.,” talks about the problems people have seeing things. One might read both essays as asking their readers to consider how we see a place, a painting, an image — or rather, how we don’t see it. Write an essay in which you summarize the ideas and arguments about “seeing” in both Price and Berger. What does each writer seem to want us to understand about “seeing”? Choose several specific passages to support your claims. Once you have highlighted each writer’s ideas about seeing, you should then move on to offer your own perspective. What do you think prevents or enables you to notice things about a place, about a piece of writing, or a piece of art? How is seeing a place different than seeing an image? What do you think are the most important connections between Price’s and Berger’s concepts of seeing?
2. Many writers in this collection concern themselves with a specific place or location. Certainly Anna Tsing and Jenny Price might both be categorized as “nature writers” and so are explicitly writing about place or environment in interesting ways. However, there are other writers who are deeply invested in the understanding of place (either the idea of place or a literal specific place, or both) — Jennine Capó Crucet, John Wideman, Ruth Behar, Gloria Anzaldúa, among others. All of these writers are interested (literally or conceptually) in places, in locations, in our positions as we move through, live in, and imagine places or spaces.

Write an essay in which you put two or more of these essays in conversation with one another in terms of their approach to place and location. What seems to be each writer’s investment in the places they write from or about? How might these writers complicate one another’s ideas about nature, environment, or location? How does each writer help you understand the place they write about in a deeper or more complex way? Why is place and location important to writing, and to the human experience?

CLAUDIA Rankine

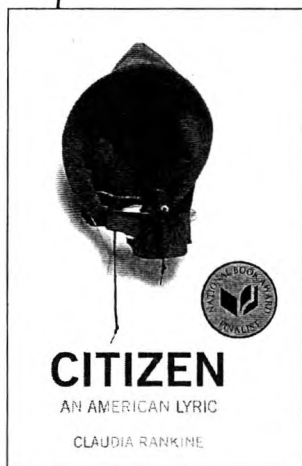


Marco Destefanis/Alamy Stock Photo

A poet, nonfiction author, playwright, and multimedia composer, Claudia Rankine creates work that is fiercely intersectional, deftly crossing genre boundaries and blooming in the unclaimed space between media and genres. Rankine has produced five books of poetry, including *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), from which the following excerpt comes. Awarded the PEN Open Book Award, PEN Literary Award, NAACP Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry for this collection, Rankine was also a finalist for the National Book Award. *Citizen* is the only poetry book that has been named a New York Times bestseller in the nonfiction category. Her other work includes poetry, plays such as *The Provenance of Beauty: A South Bronx Travelogue* (2011), and *Situations*, a multimedia documentary project she created in collaboration with the filmmaker John Lucas. Rankine founded the Racial Imaginary Institute in 2017, describing it as “a moving collaboration with other collectives, spaces, artists, and organizations toward art exhibitions, readings, dialogues, lectures, performances, and screenings that engage the subject of race.”

Born in 1963 in Kingston, Jamaica, Rankine earned her BA from Williams College and her MFA from Columbia University. After teaching at Pomona College for many years, Rankine moved in 2018 to Yale University, where she serves as the Frederick Iseman Professor of Poetry. She has received many awards recognizing her contributions to our society as a writer, including an Academy Fellowship for distinguished poetic achievement by the Academy of American Poets in 2004 and the Zell Fellowship and the MacArthur Fellowship, both in 2016.

In a 2014 interview with NPR, Rankine was asked what the line “Each time, it begins in the same way. It doesn’t begin the same way. Each time it begins, it’s the same” from her poem, “Stop and Frisk,” meant to Rankine in that particular moment. She responded, “Well, first I want to say — before I say anything, I want to extend my sympathies to the families of the police officers, you know, which — I just find that incredibly tragic — and also the families of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. I just think, in a sense, that is the thing that begins, and it begins, and it begins again — the grieving of these families due to the proliferation of guns in the United States and to racism in the structure of our dynamics.”



Rankine's holistic approach to the violence perpetrated against black lives in the United States takes into consideration deeply embedded racism — both insidious and overt — communal grief, whiteness, and gun access. Her response to the interviewer's question about these lines of poetry exists within, and far beyond, the writing. In a separate interview, Rankine illuminates her hope of bringing *Citizen* into white, liberal circles, making it a text available to people who see themselves as separate from "the bad guys." Rankine says, "The use of the second person — that 'you' — was meant to say, 'Step in here with me, because there is no me without you inside this dynamic.'" The implication that white supremacy comes in both tender and vicious varieties invites an even broader audience to engage with her work. This poetry, this truth, is for any, and every, body.

In her work, Rankine is unafraid to shine light on unspeakable violence, its root causes, or its perpetrators and victims — her work reminds us that both perpetrators and victims are continually and collectively failed by our political and social system.

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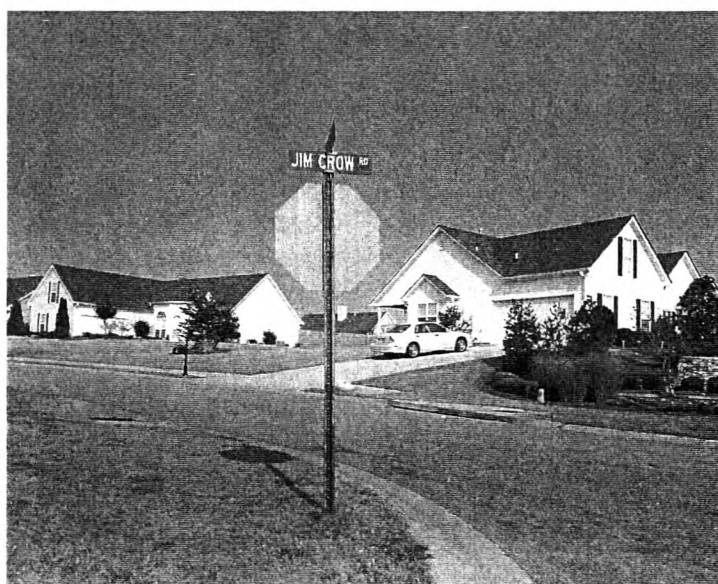
Citizen

When you are alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in a past stacked among your pillows. Usually you are nestled under blankets and the house is empty. Sometimes the moon is missing and beyond the windows the low, gray ceiling seems approachable. Its dark light dims in degrees depending on the density of clouds and you fall back into that which gets reconstructed as metaphor.

The route is often associative. You smell good. You are twelve attending Sts. Philip and James School on White Plains Road and the girl sitting in the seat behind asks you to lean to the right during exams so she can copy what you have written. Sister Evelyn is in the habit of taping the 100s and the failing grades to the coat closet doors. The girl is Catholic with waist-length brown hair. You can't remember her name: Mary? Catherine?

You never really speak except for the time she makes her request and later when she tells you you smell good and have features more like a white person. You assume she thinks she is thanking you for letting her cheat and feels better cheating from an almost white person.

Sister Evelyn never figures out your arrangement perhaps because you never turn around to copy Mary Catherine's answers. Sister Evelyn must think these two girls think a lot alike or she cares less about cheating and more about humiliation or she never actually saw you sitting there.



Michael David Murphy

Certain moments send adrenaline to the heart, dry out the tongue, and clog the lungs. Like thunder they drown you in sound, no, like lightning they strike you across the larynx. Cough. After it happened I was at a loss for words. Haven't you said this yourself? Haven't you said this to a close friend who early in your friendship, when distracted, would call you by the name of her black housekeeper? You assumed you two were the only black people in her life. Eventually she stopped doing this, though she never acknowledged her slippage. And you never called her on it (why not?) and yet, you don't forget. If this were a domestic tragedy, and it might well be, this would be your fatal flaw—your memory, vessel of your feelings. Do you feel hurt because it's the "all black people look the same" moment, or because you are being confused with another after being so close to this other?

An unsettled feeling keeps the body front and center. The wrong words enter your day like a bad egg in your mouth and puke runs down your blouse, a dampness drawing your stomach in toward your rib cage. When you look around only you remain. Your own disgust at what you smell, what you feel, doesn't bring you to your feet, not right away, because gathering energy has become its own task, needing its own argument. You are reminded of a conversation you had recently, comparing the merits of sentences constructed implicitly with "yes, and" rather than "yes, but." You and your friend decided that "yes, and" attested to a life with no turn-off, no alternative routes: you pull yourself to standing, soon enough the blouse is rinsed, it's another week, the blouse is beneath your sweater, against your skin, and you smell good.

The rain this morning pours from the gutters and everywhere else it is lost in the trees. You need your glasses to single out what you know is there because doubt is inexorable; you put on your glasses. The trees, their bark, their leaves, even the dead ones, are more vibrant wet. Yes, and it's raining. Each moment is like this—before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen. What did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? The moment stinks. Still you want to stop looking at the trees. You want to walk out and stand among them. And as light as the rain seems, it still rains down on you.

You are in the dark, in the car, watching the black-tarred street being swallowed by speed; he tells you his dean is making him hire a person of color when there are so many great writers out there.

You think maybe this is an experiment and you are being tested or retroactively insulted or you have done something that communicates this is an okay conversation to be having.

Why do you feel comfortable saying this to me? You wish the light would turn red or a police siren would go off so you could slam on the brakes, Slam into the car ahead of you, fly forward so quickly both your faces would suddenly be exposed to the wind.

As usual you drive straight through the moment with the expected backing off of what was previously said. It is not only that confrontation is headache-producing; it is also that you have a destination that doesn't include acting like this moment isn't inhabitable, hasn't happened before, and the before isn't part of the now as the night darkens and the time shortens between where we are and where we are going.

When you arrive in your driveway and turn off the car, you remain behind the wheel another ten minutes. You fear the night is being locked in and coded on a cellular level and want time to function as a power wash. Sitting there staring at the closed garage door you are reminded that a friend once told you there exists the medical term—John Henryism—for people exposed to stresses stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the buildup of erasure. Sherman James, the researcher who came up with the term, claimed the physiological costs were high. You hope by sitting in silence you are bucking the trend.

Because of your elite status from a year's worth of travel, you have already settled into your window seat on United Airlines, when the girl and her mother arrive at your row. The girl, looking over at you, tells her mother, these are our seats, but this is not what I expected. The mother's response is barely audible—I see, she says. I'll sit in the middle.

A woman you do not know wants to join you for lunch. You are visiting her campus. In the café you both order the Caesar salad. This overlap is not the beginning of anything because she immediately points out that she, her father, her grandfather, and you, all attended the same college. She wanted her son to go there as well, but because of affirmative action or minority something—she is not sure what they are calling it these days and weren't they supposed to get rid of it?—her son wasn't accepted. You are not sure if you are meant to apologize for this failure of your alma mater's legacy program; instead you ask where he ended up. The prestigious school she mentions doesn't seem to assuage her irritation. This exchange, in effect, ends your lunch. The salads arrive.

A friend argues that Americans battle between the “historical self” and the “self self.” By this she means you mostly interact as friends with mutual interest and, for the most part, compatible personalities; however, sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self, arrive with the full force of your American positioning. Then you are standing face-to-face in seconds that wipe the affable smiles right from your mouths. What did you say? Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject to any transgression of your historical self. And though your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings, they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant.

You and your partner go to see the film *The House We Live In*. You ask a friend to pick up your child from school. On your way home your phone rings. Your neighbor tells you he is standing at his window watching a menacing black guy casing both your homes. The guy is walking back and forth talking to himself and seems disturbed.

You tell your neighbor that your friend, whom he has met, is babysitting. He says, no, it's not him. He's met your friend and this isn't that nice young man. Anyway, he wants you to know, he's called the police.

Your partner calls your friend and asks him if there's a guy walking back and forth in front of your home. Your friend says that if anyone were outside he would see him because he is standing outside. You hear the sirens through the speakerphone.

Your friend is speaking to your neighbor when you arrive home. The four police cars are gone. Your neighbor has apologized to your friend and is now apologizing to you. Feeling somewhat responsible for the actions of your neighbor, you clumsily tell your friend that the next time he wants to talk on the phone he should just go in the backyard. He looks at you a long minute before saying he can speak on the phone wherever he wants. Yes, of course, you say. Yes, of course.

When the stranger asks, Why do you care? you just stand there staring at him. He has just referred to the boisterous teenagers in Starbucks as niggers. Hey, I am standing right here, you responded, not necessarily expecting him to turn to you.

He is holding the lidded paper cup in one hand and a small paper bag in the other. They are just being kids. Come on, no need to get all KKK on them, you say.

Now there you go, he responds.

The people around you have turned away from their screens. The teenagers are on pause. There I go? you ask, feeling irritation begin to rain down. Yes, and something about hearing yourself repeating this stranger's accusation in a voice usually reserved for your partner makes you smile.

A man knocked over her son in the subway. You feel your own body wince. He's okay, but the son of a bitch kept walking. She says she grabbed the stranger's arm and told him to apologize: I told him to look at the boy and apologize. Yes, and you want it to stop, you want the child pushed to the ground to be seen, to be helped to his feet, to be brushed off by the person that did not see him, has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself.

The beautiful thing is that a group of men began to stand behind me like a fleet of bodyguards, she says, like newly found uncles and brothers.

The new therapist specializes in trauma counseling. You have only ever spoken on the phone. Her house has a side gate that leads to a back entrance she uses for patients. You walk down a path bordered on both sides with deer grass and rosemary to the gate, which turns out to be locked.

At the front door the bell is a small round disc that you press firmly. When the door finally opens, the woman standing there yells, at the top of her lungs, Get away from my house! What are you doing in my yard?

It's as if a wounded Doberman pinscher or a German shepherd has gained the power of speech. And though you back up a few steps, you manage to tell her you have an appointment. You have an appointment? she spits back. Then she pauses. Everything pauses. Oh, she says, followed by, oh, yes, that's right. I am sorry.

I am so sorry, so, so sorry.



Kate Clark

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Even in this brief excerpt, Rankine often returns to ideas of (in)visibility and silence. Reread this excerpt from *Citizen*, taking care to mark these moments. What does visibility have to do with identity and racism? And how does Rankine see silence functioning in her daily interactions as a black woman? What connections can you make among racism, visibility, and silence?
2. In many ways, *Citizen* is both a piece of nonfiction prose and a piece of poetry. What genre do you think best suits the writing Rankine is doing? If the writing does not seem to “fit” in a classic genre, can you invent a new name for what she is doing? Look at the physical layout of Rankine’s writing. How do you see white space functioning in this text? Why does her writing look the way it does?
3. Rankine intersperses her writing with two photographs — one depicts a neighborhood street and another appears to be an animal with a human face. Consider the placement of these photos. How might you “read” the images? How do they advance Rankine’s argument? Why might she have chosen to replace text with pictures?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. In our headnote we cite from an interview in which Rankine says of her work in *Citizen*, “The use of the second person — that ‘you’ — was meant to say, ‘Step in here with me, because there is no me without you inside this dynamic.’” (p. 500). Choose two or three specific moments from the excerpt where you think Rankine is employing this “you” in an interesting way. What do you think Rankine means by her interview comment, and how do you see that meaning reflected in this work itself?
 Write an essay in which you consider the impact of the second person usage in Rankine’s work. Contextualize and analyze your two or three examples. What seems noteworthy about these instances? How are you, as a reader, positioned or not positioned as this “you”? What do you understand as Rankine’s goals in positioning you this way? What do you, as a *writer*, have to learn from this writerly choice Rankine makes to often speak in “you” rather than “I” — or to conflate the “you” and the “I”?
2. Rankine has a way, as a writer, of recording a scene and leaving it there for us to examine, leaving its details there to resonate with us after she has finished the story of that particular moment. Choose one of Rankine’s narratives to reread several times, paying attention to what you find particularly noteworthy about the story she is telling and about her approach to how she tells the story.

Write an essay in which you describe Rankine's approach to storytelling. Move carefully through the example you chose to reread and examine. What are the moves you see Rankine making? What makes her telling of the story effective? How does her writing seem to *work* on a reader? What do you think were Rankine's goals for this particular narrative? How can you tell those were her goals? And finally, what for you is the relationship between the form (the way Rankine writes the story) and its content (what the story is about)? And how can that relationship help you articulate more broadly the connection between *what* is written and *how* it is written?

3. In one of her prose poems, Rankine begins, "A friend argues that Americans battle between the 'historical self' and the 'self self.'" (p. 510). This particular piece goes on to elaborate this distinction. Write an essay in which you, first, explain what you think this means. Then, through careful textual analysis, explore your understanding of what Rankine thinks about this distinction. Does she buy it? Does she find it interesting, problematic, helpful? How can you tell? What do you think of this distinction yourself?



MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. One way to read Claudia Rankine is to read her narratives as asking central questions or posing central arguments about race and racism in America. Consider a few of the other texts in this collection that could be read the same way, as raising the similar kinds of questions and arguments. The writers of these texts — perhaps you might think of Kwame Anthony Appiah, John Edgar Wideman, June Jordan, W. E. B. Du Bois, Layli Long Soldier, Joy Castro, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Gloria Bird, Jeff Chang, or Gloria Anzaldúa — might approach the problem of racism differently or through different stylistic lenses, but they are also concerned with some of the same questions and arguments as Rankine.

Write an essay in which you point out what you believe to be several of Rankine's most pressing questions about race and racism. Quote specific passages from her essay to illustrate why you believe these questions are important to Rankine. Then, consider one (or several) of the other essays mentioned above. Which of these essays seems to address these most pressing questions as well? How do these other writers help you tell the story of Rankine's poetry and prose? Which passages do you think Rankine would want you to pay attention to from these other essays? How do these other passages extend, complicate, or demonstrate Rankine's central questions around issues of race and racism?

2. Rankine's poetry can be understood to be *about* language itself — how we use it, how it shapes and reflects our understanding of the world. One might also that this particular focus on language is something many poets

do. For example, Layli Long Soldier (p. 425) and Solmaz Sharif (p. 563), other poets included in this anthology, are also asking us to think carefully about language. Reread Long Soldier's, Sharif's, and Rankine's writing, looking for moments you would characterize as focused on language (how we and others use it, and how it shapes/reflects our understandings).

Write an essay in which you consider these poets' attention to and focus on language. You might revisit Long Soldier's assertion that "Everything is in the language we use" (p. 429) and connect that claim to work you see Rankine doing in chronicling some of her interactions, particularly with white people. How does an understanding of or a focus on particular language help us understand the history of racism in the United States? Why is it important which words we use to talk about which things? What do you suppose each writer hopes we will see about how language plays (and continues to play) a role in oppression and violence? Cite specific passages from Sharif, Rankine, and Long Soldier to illuminate how each writer positions language (what is said, how it is said, what it means) as crucial to understanding history, writing, and the world.

3. In our "Introduction," we write the following:

But there is another kind of difficulty teachers and students alike will face in encountering the readings we've curated here. This difficulty stems from coming into contact with perspectives and descriptions of the world that you find difficult to hear. Perhaps because your own identity and perspective is either very distant or very close to the ones taken up in a given reading. Or perhaps because it is often difficult to acknowledge and take account of what is urgently and gravely wrong in our current cultural and political moment. The essays here challenge us to *be* writers — which means, in a fundamental sense, to be willing to look carefully, closely, and unrelentingly both at the world as you imagine it to be and at the world as it is for those who are *not* you. In this spirit, we invite you to develop and nurture new ways of reading for yourself, new ways of listening when someone else (for example, an author of one of the essays in this book) is speaking. We believe this will not only make you a better reader and writer, but that it will also make you a more attentive and precise thinker in your life at large — both your academic life *and* your personal/social/professional life as you move through and leave your college experience. (p. 2)

In this assignment, we invite you to consider again this idea of "the world as you imagine it to be and the world as it is for those who are *not* you." You might begin by describing what you think we mean in the above passage and how that might connect to your own reading of Rankine. Where do you see yourself or your world in Rankine's essay? What experiences do you bring to your reading of the text; in other words, how does your own identity and experience shape the way you understand Rankine's work? Along these

lines, we'd like you to consider other essays in this collection that might be "difficult" for you to read. These can be essays you have already explored through your writing course, but they can also be essays that are new to you. Read through the introductions and first pages of essays that stand out to you to discover one or two other essays that seem "difficult." Write an essay in which you consider your experience with Rankine's work and connect that experience to another essay in the collection: What does it mean for a text to be difficult? How can you tell it will be (or is) difficult for you? How does the writer anticipate (or not) your difficulty? And what strategies as a reader can you use to intellectually and emotionally cope with this kind of difficulty?

EDWARD Said



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Edward Said (1935–2003) was one of the world's most distinguished literary critics and scholars, distinguished (among other things) for his insistence on the connectedness of art and politics, literature and history. As he argues in his influential essay "The World, the Text, the Critic,"

Texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society — in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. The same is doubtless true of the critic, as reader and as writer.

Said (pronounced "sigh-eed") was a "worldly" reader and writer, and the selection that follows is a case in point. It is part of his long-term engagement with the history and politics of the Middle East, particularly of the people we refer to as Palestinians. His critical efforts, perhaps best represented by his most influential book, *Orientalism* (1978), examine the ways the West has represented and understood the East ("They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented"), demonstrating how Western journalists, writers, artists, and scholars have created and preserved a view of Eastern cultures as mysterious, dangerous, unchanging, and inferior.

Said was born in Jerusalem, in what was at that time Palestine, to parents who were members of the Christian Palestinian community. In 1947, as the United Nations was establishing Israel as a Jewish state, his family fled to Cairo. In the introduction to *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (1986), the book from which the following selection was taken, he says,

I was twelve, with the limited awareness and memory of a relatively sheltered boy. By the mid-spring of 1948 my extended family in its entirety had departed, evicted from Palestine along with almost a million other Palestinians. This was the *nakba*, or catastrophe, which heralded the destruction of our society and our dispossession as a people.

Said was educated in English-speaking schools in Cairo and Massachusetts; he completed his undergraduate training at Princeton and received his PhD from Harvard in 1964. He was a member of the English department at Columbia University in New York from 1963 until his death

from leukemia. In the 1970s, he began writing to a broad public on the situation of the Palestinians; from 1977 to 1991, he served on the Palestinian National Council, an exile government. In 1991, he split from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) over its Gulf War policy (Yasser Arafat's support of Saddam Hussein) and, as he says, for "what I considered to be its new defeatism."

The peculiar and distinctive project represented by *After the Last Sky* began in the 1980s, in the midst of this political engagement. "In 1983," Said writes in the introduction,

while I was serving as a consultant to the United Nations for its International Conference on the Question of Palestine (ICQP), I suggested that photographs of Palestinians be hung in the entrance hall to the main conference site in Geneva. I had of course known and admired Mohr's work with John Berger, and I recommended that he be commissioned to photograph some of the principal locales of Palestinian life. Given the initial enthusiasm for the idea, Mohr left on a special UN-sponsored trip to the Near East. The photographs he brought back were indeed wonderful; the official response, however, was puzzling and, to someone with a taste for irony, exquisite. You can hang them up, we were told, but no writing can be displayed with them.

In response to a UN mandate, Said had also commissioned twenty studies for the participants at the conference. Of the twenty, only three were accepted as "official documents." The others were rejected "because one after another Arab state objected to this or that principle, this or that insinuation, this or that putative injury to its sovereignty." And yet, Said argues, the complex experience, history, and identity of the people known as Palestinians remained virtually unknown, particularly in the West (and in the United States). To most, Said says, "Palestinians are visible principally as fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariahs." When Jean Mohr, the photographer, told a friend that he was preparing an exhibition on the Palestinians, the friend responded, "Don't you think the subject's a bit dated? Look, I've taken photographs of Palestinians too, especially in the refugee camps . . . it's really sad! But these days, who's interested in people who eat off the ground with their hands? And then there's all that terrorism. . . . I'd have thought you'd be better off using your energy and capabilities on something more worthwhile."

For both Said and Mohr, these rejections provided the motive for *After the Last Sky*. Said's account, from the book's introduction, is worth quoting at length for how well it represents the problems of writing:

Let us use photographs and a text, we said to each other, to say something that hasn't been said about Palestinians. Yet the problem of writing about and representing — in all senses of the word — Palestinians in some fresh way is part of a much larger problem. For it is not as if no one speaks about or portrays the Palestinians. The difficulty is that everyone, including the Palestinians themselves, speaks a very great deal. A huge body of literature has grown up, most of it polemical, accusatory, denunciatory. At this point, no one writing about

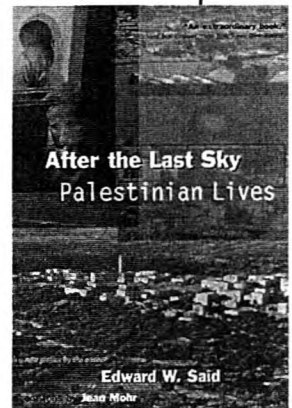
Palestine — and indeed, no one going to Palestine — starts from scratch: We have all been there before, whether by reading about it, experiencing its millennial presence and power, or actually living there for periods of time. It is a terribly crowded place, almost too crowded for what it is asked to be by way of history or interpretation of history.

The resulting book is quite a remarkable document. The photos are not the photos of a glossy coffee-table book, and yet they are compelling and memorable. The prose at times leads to the photos; at times it follows as meditation or explanation, an effort to get things right — “things like exile, dispossession, habits of expression, internal and external landscapes, stubbornness, poignancy, and heroism.” It is a writing with pictures, not a writing to which photos were later added. Said had, in fact, been unable to return to Israel / Palestine for several years. As part of this project, he had hoped to be able to take a trip to the West Bank and Gaza in order to see beyond Mohr’s photographs, but such a trip proved to be unsafe and impossible — both Arab and Israeli officials had reason to treat him with suspicion. The book was written in exile; the photos, memories, books, and newspapers, these were the only vehicles of return.

After the Last Sky is, Said wrote in 1999, “an unreconciled book, in which the contradictions and antinomies of our lives and experiences remain as they are, assembled neither (I hope) into neat wholes nor into sentimental ruminations about the past. Fragments, memories, disjointed scenes, intimate particulars.” The Palestinians, Said wrote in the introduction, fall between classifications. “We are at once too recently formed and too variously experienced to be a population of articulate exiles with a completely systematic vision and too voluble and trouble making to be simply a pathetic mass of refugees.” And he adds, “The whole point of this book is to engage this difficulty, to deny the habitually simple, even harmful representations of Palestinians, and to replace them with something more capable of capturing the complex reality of their experience.”

Furthermore, he says, “just as Jean Mohr and I, a Swiss and a Palestinian, collaborated in the process, we would like you — Palestinians, Europeans, Americans, Africans, Latin Americans, Asians — to do so also.” This is both an invitation and a challenge. While there is much to learn about the Palestinians, the people and their history, the opening moment in the collaborative project is to learn to look and to read in the service of a complex and nuanced act of understanding.

Said is the author of many books and collections, including *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966), *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), *Orientalism* (1978), *The Question of Palestine* (1979), *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), *Blaming the Victims* (1988), *Musical Elaborations* (1991), *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1989–1994* (1994), *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), *Peace and Its Discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process* (1995), *Out of Place: A Memoir* (2000),



Reflections on Exile (2000), *The Edward Said Reader* (2000), *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (2001), *Power, Politics, and Culture* (2001), *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land* (2001), *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (2006), and *Music at the Limits* (2007).

Jean Mohr has worked as a photographer for UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and the International Red Cross. He has collaborated on four books with John Berger: *Ways of Seeing* (1972; see excerpt on p. 138), *A Seventh Man* (1975), *Another Way of Telling* (1982), and *A Fortunate Man* (1967).

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States

Caught in a meager, anonymous space outside a drab Arab city, outside a refugee camp, outside the crushing time of one disaster after another, a wedding party stands, surprised, sad, slightly uncomfortable. Palestinians — the telltale mixture of styles and attitudes is so evidently theirs — near Tripoli in northern Lebanon. A few months after this picture was taken their camp was ravaged by intra-Palestinian fighting. Cutting across the wedding party's path here is the ever-present Mercedes, emblazoned with its extra mark of authenticity, the proud *D* for *Deutschland*. A rare luxury in the West, the Mercedes — usually secondhand and smuggled in — is the commonest of cars in the Levant. It has become what horse, mule, and camel were, and then much more. Universal taxi, it is a symbol of modern technology domesticated, of the intrusion of the West into traditional life, of illicit trade. More important, the Mercedes is the all-purpose conveyance, something one uses for everything — funerals, weddings, births, proud display, leaving home, coming home, fixing, stealing, reselling, running away in, hiding in. But because Palestinians have



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Tripoli, Badawi camp, May 1983.

no state of their own to shield them, the Mercedes, its provenance and destination obscure, seems like an intruder, a delegate of the forces that both dislocate and hem them in. "The earth is closing on us, pushing us through the last passage," writes the poet Mahmoud Darwish.

The paradox of mobility and insecurity. Wherever we Palestinians are, we are not in our Palestine, which no longer exists. You travel, from one end of the Arab world to the other, in Europe, Africa, the Americas, Australia, and there you find Palestinians like yourself who, like yourself, are subject to special laws, a special status, the markings of a force and violence not yours. Exiles at home as well as abroad, Palestinians also still inhabit the territory of former Palestine (Israel, the West Bank, Gaza), in sadly reduced circumstances. They are either "the Arabs of Judea and Samaria," or, in Israel, "non-Jews." Some are referred to as "present absentees." In Arab countries, except for Jordan, they are given special cards identifying them as "Palestinian refugees," and even where they are respectable engineers, teachers, business people, or technicians, they know that in the eyes of their host country they will always be aliens. Inevitably, photographs of Palestinians today include this fact and make it visible.

Memory adds to the unrelieved intensity of Palestinian exile. Palestine is central to the cultures of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; Orient and Occident have turned it into a legend. There is no forgetting it, no way of overlooking it. The world news is often full of what has happened in Palestine-Israel, the latest Middle East crisis, the most recent Palestinian



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Tel Sheva, 1979. A village of settled nomads near Bersheeba. Some years ago, these people still lived in a tent, under the desert sky. The carpet on the ground is the only reminder of that earlier period.

exploits. The sights, wares, and monuments of Palestine are the objects of commerce, war, pilgrimage, cults, the subjects of literature, art, song, fantasy. East and West, their high and their commercial cultures, have descended on Palestine. Bride and groom wear the ill-fitting nuptial costumes of Europe, yet behind and around them are the clothes and objects of their native land, natural to their friends and attendants. The happiness of the occasion is at odds with their lot as refugees with nowhere to go. The children playing nearby contrast starkly with the unappealing surroundings; the new husband's large workman's hands clash with his wife's delicate, obscuring white. When we cross from Palestine into other territories, even if we find ourselves decently in new places, the old ones loom behind us as tangible and unreal as reproduced memory or absent causes for our present state.

Sometimes the poignancy of resettlement stands out like bold script imposed on faint pencil traces. The fit between body and new setting is not good. The angles are wrong. Lines supposed to decorate a wall instead form an imperfectly assembled box in which we have been put. We perch on chairs uncertain whether to address or evade our interlocutor. This child is held out, and yet also held in. Men and women re-express the unattractiveness around them: The angle made across her face by the woman's robe duplicates the ghastly wall pattern, the man's crossed feet repeat and contradict the outward thrust of the chair leg [p. 525]. He seems unsettled, poised for departure. Now what? Now where? All at once it is our transience and impermanence that our visibility expresses, for we can be seen as figures forced to push on to another house, village, or region. Just as we once were taken from one "habitat" to a new one, we can be moved again.

Exile is a series of portraits without names, without contexts. Images that are largely unexplained, nameless, mute. I look at them without precise anecdotal knowledge, but their realistic exactness nevertheless makes a deeper impression than mere information. I cannot reach the actual people who were photographed, except through a European photographer who saw them for me. And I imagine that he, in turn, spoke to them through an interpreter. The one thing I know for sure, however, is that they treated him politely but as someone who came from, or perhaps acted at the direction of, those who put them where they so miserably are. There was the embarrassment of people uncertain why they were being looked at and recorded. Powerless to stop it.

When A. Z.'s father was dying, he called his children, one of whom is married to my sister, into his room for a last family gathering. A frail, very old man from Haifa, he had spent his last thirty-four years in Beirut in a state of agitated disbelief at the loss of his house and property. Now he murmured to his children the final faltering words of a penniless, helpless patriarch. "Hold on to the keys and the deed," he told them, pointing to a battered suitcase near his bed, a repository of the family estate salvaged from Palestine when Haifa's Arabs were expelled. These intimate mementos of a past irrevocably lost circulate among us, like the genealogies and

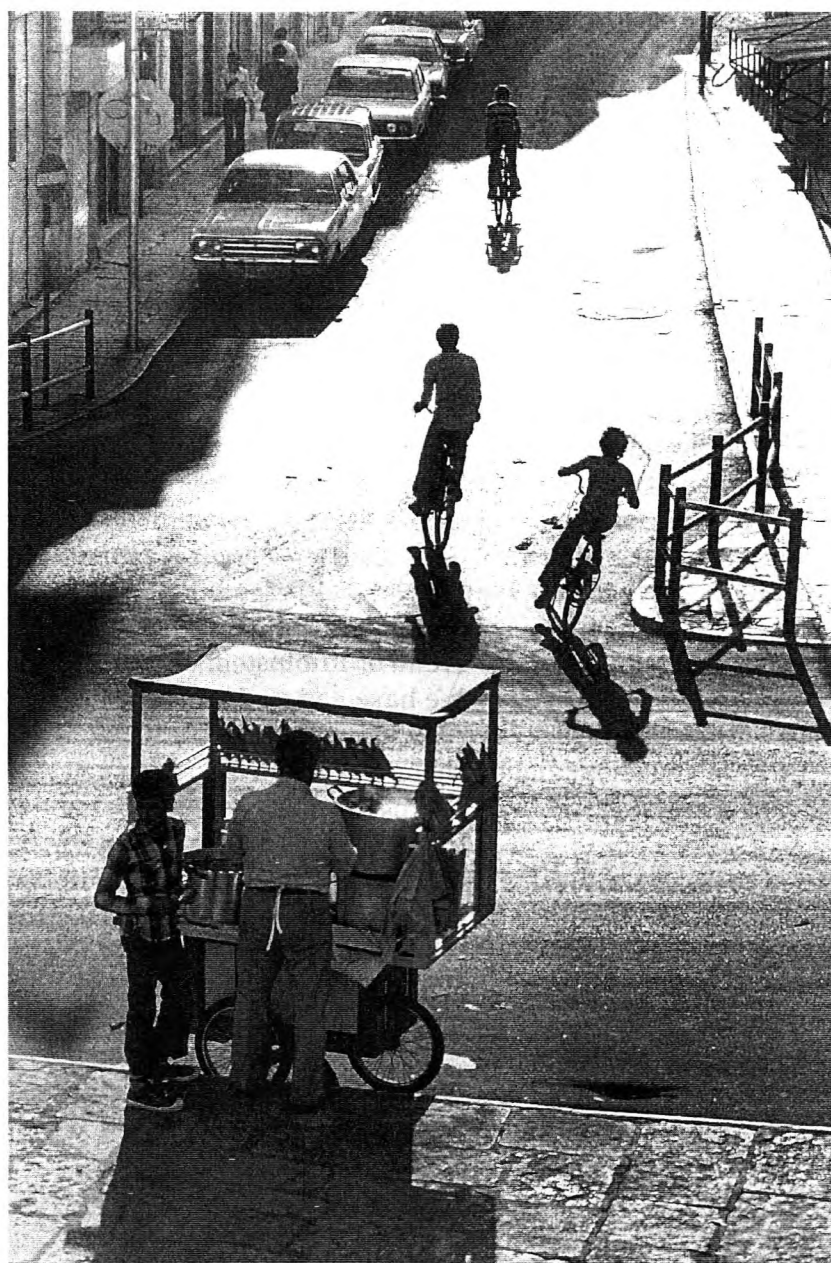
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Amman, 1984. A visit to the former mayor of Jerusalem and his wife, in exile in Jordan.

fables of a wandering singer of tales. Photographs, dresses, objects severed from their original locale, the rituals of speech and custom: Much reproduced, enlarged, thematized, embroidered, and passed around, they are strands in the web of affiliations we Palestinians use to tie ourselves to our identity and to each other.

Sometimes these objects, heavy with memory — albums, rosary beads, shawls, little boxes — seem to me like encumbrances. We carry them about, hang them up on every new set of walls we shelter in, reflect lovingly on them. Then we do not notice the bitterness, but it continues and grows nonetheless. Nor do we acknowledge the frozen immobility of our attitudes.



© Jean Mohr

Ramallah, 1979. An everyday street scene, banal and reassuring. And yet, the tension is constant. A passing military jeep, a flying stone—the incident, the drama, can occur at any moment.

In the end the past owns us. My father spent his life trying to escape these objects, “Jerusalem” chief among them—the actual place as much as its reproduced and manufactured self. Born in Jerusalem, as were his parents, grandparents, and all his family back in time to a distant vanishing point, he was a child of the Old City who traded with tourists in bits of the true cross and crowns of thorn. Yet he hated the place; for him, he often said, it meant death. Little of it remained with him except a fragmentary story or two, an odd coin or medal, one photograph of his father on horseback, and

two small rugs. I never even saw a picture of my grandmother's face. But as he grew older, he reverted to old Jerusalemite expressions that I did not understand, never having heard them during the years of my youth.

Identity — who we are, where we come from, what we are — is difficult to maintain in exile. Most other people take their identity for granted. Not the Palestinian, who is required to show proofs of identity more or less constantly. It is not only that we are regarded as terrorists, but that our existence as native Arab inhabitants of Palestine, with primordial rights there (and not elsewhere), is either denied or challenged. And there is more. Such as it is, our existence is linked negatively to encomiums about Israel's democracy, achievements, excitement; in much Western rhetoric we have slipped into the place occupied by Nazis and anti-Semites; collectively, we can aspire to little except political anonymity and resettlement; we are known for no actual achievement, no characteristic worthy of esteem, except the effrontery of disrupting Middle East peace. Some Israeli settlers on the West Bank say: "The Palestinians can stay here, with no rights, as resident aliens." Other Israelis are less kind. We have no known Einsteins, no Chagall, no Freud or Rubinstein to protect us with a legacy of glorious achievements. We have had no Holocaust to protect us with the world's compassion. We are "other," and opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement and exodus. Silence and discretion veil the hurt, slow the body searches, soothe the sting of loss.

A zone of recollected pleasure surrounds the few unchanged spots of Palestinian life in Palestine. The foodsellers and peddlers — itinerant vendors of cakes or corn — are still there for the casual eye to see, and they still provoke the appetite. They seem to travel not only from place to



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place, but from an earlier time to the present, carrying with them the same clientele — the young girls and boys, the homeward-bound cyclist, the loitering student or clerk — now as then. We buy their wares with the same surreptitiously found change (who can remember the unit? was it a piaster? fil? shilling?) spent on the same meager object, neither especially good nor especially well prepared. The luxurious pleasure of tasting the vendor's *sim-sim*, the round sesame cakes dipped in that tangy mixture of thyme and sumac, or his *durra*, boiled corn sprayed with salt, surpasses the mere act of eating and opens before us the altogether agreeable taste of food not connected with meals, with nourishment, with routine. But what a distance now actually separates me from the concreteness of that life. How easily traveled the photographs make it seem, and how possible to suspend the barriers keeping me from the scenes they portray.

For the land is further away than it has ever been. Born in Jerusalem in late 1935, I left mandatory Palestine permanently at the end of 1947. In the spring of 1948, my last cousin evacuated our family's house in West Jerusalem; Martin Buber subsequently lived there till his death, I have been told. I grew up in Egypt, then

came to the United States as a student. In 1966 I visited Ramallah, part of the Jordanian West Bank, for a family wedding. My father, who was to die five years later, accompanied my sister and me. Since our visit, all the members of my family have resettled — in Jordan, in Leba-

non, in the United States, and in Europe. As far as I know, I have no relatives who still live in what was once Palestine. Wars, revolutions, civil struggles have changed the countries I have lived in — Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt — beyond recognition. Until thirty-five years ago I could travel from Cairo to Beirut overland, through territories held or in other ways controlled by rival colonial powers. Now, although my mother lives in Beirut, I have not visited her since the Israeli invasion of 1982: Palestinians are no longer welcome there. The fact is that today I can neither return to the places of my youth, nor voyage freely in the countries and places that mean the most to me, nor feel safe from arrest or violence even in the countries I used to frequent but whose governments and policies have changed radically in recent times. There is little that is more unpleasant for me these days than the customs and police check upon entering an Arab country.

Consider the tremendous upheavals since 1948 each of which effectively destroyed the ecology of our previous existence. When I was born, we in Palestine felt ourselves to be part of a small community, presided over by the majority community and one or another of the outside powers holding sway over the territory. My family and I, for example, were members of a tiny Protestant group within a much larger Greek Orthodox Christian minority, within the larger Sunni Islam majority; the important

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outside power was Britain, with its great rival France a close second. But then after World War II Britain and France lost their hold, and for the first time we directly confronted the colonial legacy — inept rulers, divided populations, conflicting promises made to resident Arabs and mostly European Jews with incompatible claims. In 1948 Israel was established; Palestine was destroyed, and the great Palestinian dispossession began. In 1956 Egypt was invaded by Britain, France, and Israel, causing what was left of the large Levantine communities there (Italian, Greek, Jewish, Armenian, Syrian) to leave. The rise of Abdel Nasser fired all Arabs — especially Palestinians — with the hope of a revived Arab nationalism, but after the union of Syria with Egypt failed in 1961, the Arab cold war, as it has been called, began in earnest; Saudi Arabia versus Egypt, Jordan versus Syria, Syria versus Iraq. . . . A new population of refugees, migrant workers, and traveling political parties crisscrossed the Arab world. We Palestinians immersed ourselves in the politics of Baathism in Syria and Iraq, of Nasserism in Egypt, of the Arab Nationalist Movement in Lebanon.

The 1967 war was followed shortly after by the Arab oil boom. For the first time, Palestinian nationalism arose as an independent force in the Middle East. Never did our future seem more hopeful. In time, however, our appearance on the political scene stimulated, if it did not actually cause, a great many less healthy phenomena: fundamentalist Islam, Maronite nationalism, Jewish zealotry. The new consumer culture, the computerized economy, further exacerbated the startling disparities in the Arab world between rich and poor, old and new, privileged and disinherited. Then, starting in 1975, the Lebanese civil war pitted the various Lebanese sects, the Palestinians, and a number of Arab and foreign powers against each other. Beirut was destroyed as the intellectual and political nerve center of Arab life; for us, it was the end of our only important, relatively independent center of Palestinian nationalism, with the Palestinian Liberation Organization at its heart. Anwar Sadat recognized Israel, and Camp David further dismantled the region's alliances and disrupted its balance. After the Iranian revolution in 1979 came the Iran-Iraq war. Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon put more Palestinians on the move, as the massacres in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila reduced the community still further. By the end of 1983, Palestinians were fighting each other, and Syria and Libya were directly involved, supporting Palestinian dissidents against PLO loyalists. With the irony typical of our political fate, however, in mid-1985 we were united together in Sabra and Shatila to fight off a hostile Shi'ite militia patronized by Syria.

The stability of geography and the continuity of land — these have completely disappeared from my life and the life of all Palestinians. If we are not stopped at borders, or herded into new camps, or denied reentry and residence, or barred from travel from one place to another, more of our land is taken, our lives are interfered with arbitrarily, our voices are prevented from reaching each other, our identity is confined to frightened little islands in an inhospitable environment of superior military force sanitized by the clinical jargon of pure administration. On the West Bank and in Gaza we confront

several Zionist “master plans” — which, according to Meron Benvenisti, ex-deputy mayor of Jerusalem, are “explicitly sectarian.” He continues:

The criteria established to determine priorities of settlement regions are “*interconnection [havirah]* between existing Jewish areas for the creation of [Jewish] settlement continuity” and “*separation [hayitz]* to restrict uncontrolled Arab settlement and the prevention of Arab settlement blocs”; “*scarcity [hesech]* refers to areas devoid of Jewish settlement.” In these criteria “pure planning and political planning elements are included.”

*(The West Bank Data Project:
A Survey of Israeli Policies)*

Continuity for *them*, the dominant population; discontinuity for *us*, the dispossessed and dispersed.

The circle is completed, though, when we Palestinians acknowledge that much the same thesis is adhered to by Arab and other states where sizable Palestinian communities exist. There too we are in dispersed camps, regions, quarters, zones; but unlike their Israeli counterparts, these places are not the scientific product of “pure planning” or “political planning.” The Baqa’a camp in Amman, the Palestinian quarter of Hawaly in Kuwait, are simply there.

All forms of Palestinian activity, all attempts at unity, are suspect. On the West Bank and Gaza, “development” (the systematic strengthening of Palestinian economic and social life) is forbidden, whereas “improvement” is tolerated so long as there isn’t too much of it; so long as it doesn’t become development. The colors of the Palestinian flag are outlawed by Israeli military law; Fathi Gabin of Gaza, an artist, was given a six-month



Tyre, South Lebanon, 1983. Bourj el-Shemali camp. The car bears witness to a drama, circumstances unknown. The flowers: the month of May, it is spring. The children: wearing smart clothes, almost certainly donated by a charity. They are refugees — the children of refugees.

© Jean Mohr



Bedouin encampment near Bersheeba, 1979.

prison sentence for using black, green, red, and white in one of his works. An exhibit of Palestinian culture at al-Najah University in Nablus earned the school a four-month closing. Since our history is forbidden, narratives are rare; the story of origins, of home, of nation is underground. When it appears it is broken, often wayward and meandering in the extreme, always coded, usually in outrageous forms — mock-epics, satires, sardonic parables, absurd rituals — that make little sense to an outsider. Thus Palestinian life is scattered, discontinuous, marked by the artificial and imposed arrangements of interrupted or confined space, by the

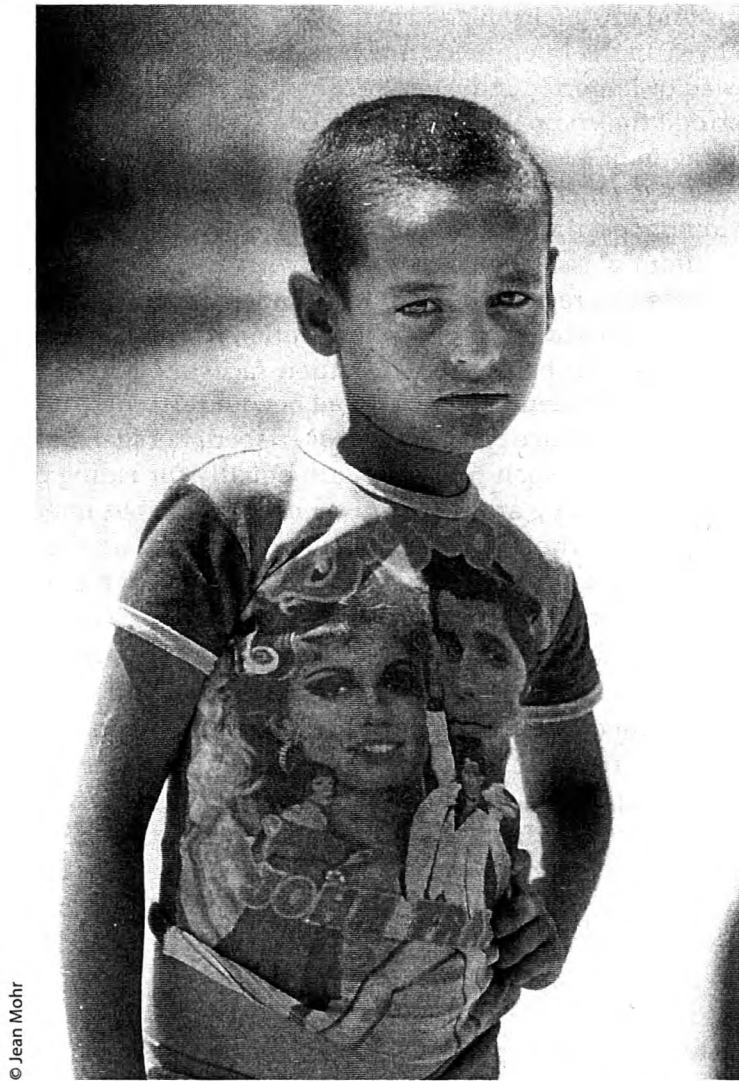
dislocations and unsynchronized rhythms of disturbed time. Across our children's lives, in the open fields in which they play, lie the ruins of war, of a borrowed or imported industrial technology, of cast-off or abandoned forms. How odd the conjuncture, and yet for Palestinians, how fitting. For where no straight line leads from home to birthplace to school to maturity, all events are accidents, all progress is a digression, all residence is exile. We linger in nondescript places, neither here nor there; we peer through windows without glass, ride conveyances without movement or power. Resourcefulness and receptivity are the attitudes that serve best.

The difference between the new generation of Palestinians and that of 1948 is striking. Our parents bore on their faces the marks of disaster uncomprehended. Suddenly their past had been interrupted, their society obliterated, their existence radically impoverished. Refugees, all of them. Our children know no such past. Cars are equally for riding or, ruined, for playing in. Everything around them seems expendable, impermanent, unstable, especially where — as in Lebanon — Palestinian communities have been disastrously depleted or destroyed, where much of their life is undocumented, where they themselves are uncoun-
 ted.

No Palestinian census exists. There is no line that can be drawn from one Palestinian to another that does not seem to interfere with the political designs of one or another state. While all of us live among "normal" people, people with complete lives, they seem to us hopelessly out of reach, with their countries, their familial continuity, their societies intact. How does a Palestinian father tell his son and daughter that Lebanon (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, New York) is where we are, but not where we are *from*? How does a mother confirm her intimate recollections of childhood in Palestine to her children, now that the facts, the places, even the names, are no longer allowed to exist?

So we borrow and we patch things together. Palestinians retain the inflections of Jaffa, of Hebron, of Jerusalem and other cities left behind, even as their dialect becomes that of Beirut, Detroit, or Paris. I have found out much more about Palestine and met many more Palestinians than I ever did, or perhaps could have, in pre-1948 Palestine. For a long time I thought that this was so because I was a child then, somewhat sheltered, a member of a minority. But my experience is confirmed by my oldest and closest Palestinian friend, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod. Although he was more in and of pre-1948 Palestine — because older, more conscious and active — than I ever was, he too says that he is much more in contact with Palestinians today than when he was in Palestine. He writes,

Thanks to modern technological progress, Palestinian families, and Palestinian society as a whole, have been able to forge very numerous human, social, and political links. By getting on a plane I can see the majority of my friends. It's because of this that our family has remained unified. I see all the members of my family at least once or twice a year. Being in Jaffa, I could never have seen relatives who lived in Gaza, for example.



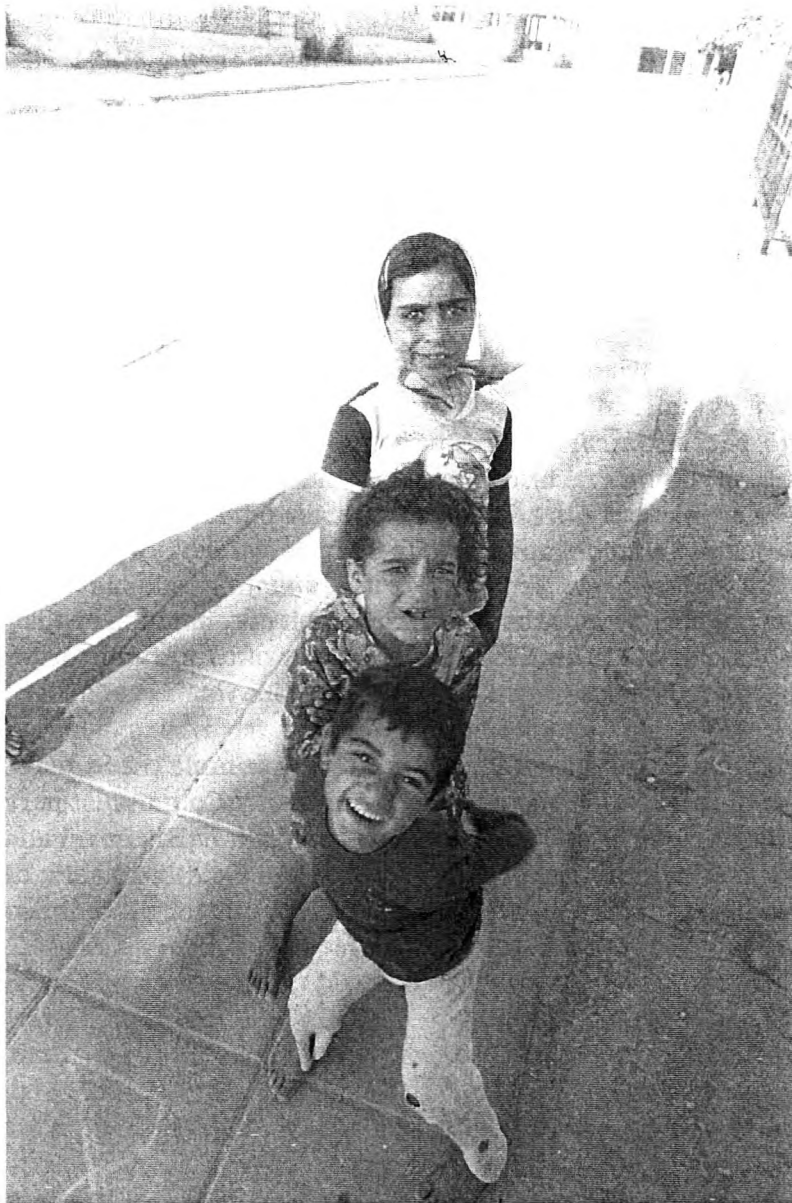
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Gaza, 1979. Refugee camp. A boy of unknown age.

But Ibrahim does not celebrate this sociability: "I constantly experience the sense that something is missing for me. To compensate for this lack, I multiply and intensify human contacts."

Over the missing "something" are superimposed new realities. Plane travel and phone conversations nourish and connect the fortunate; the symbols of a universal pop culture enshroud the vulnerable.

There can be no orderly sequence of time. You see it in our children who seem to have skipped a phase of growth or, more alarming, achieved an out-of-season maturity in one part of their body or mind while the rest remains childlike. None of us can forget the whispers and occasional proclamations that our children are "the population factor" — to be feared, and hence to be deported — or constitute special targets for death. I heard it said in Lebanon that Palestinian children in particular should be killed because each of them is a potential terrorist. Kill them before they kill you.



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Tel Sheva, 1979. A group portrait, taken at the request of the children.

How rich our mutability, how easily we change (and are changed) from one thing to another, how unstable our place — and all because of the missing foundation of our existence, the lost ground of our origin, the broken link with our land and our past. There are no Palestinians. Who are the Palestinians? “The inhabitants of Judea and Samaria.” Non-Jews. Terrorists. Troublemakers. DPs.¹ Refugees. Names on a card. Numbers on a list. Praised in speeches — *el pueblo palestino, il popolo palestino, le*

¹DPs Displaced persons or displaced people. [Eds.]

peuple palestinien — but treated as interruptions, intermittent presences. Gone from Jordan in 1970, now from Lebanon.

None of these departures and arrivals is clean, definitive. Some of us leave, others stay behind. Remnants, new arrivals, old residents. Two great images encapsulate our unresolved existence. One is the identity card (passport, travel document, laissez-passer), which is never Palestinian but always something else; it is the subject of our national poem, Mahmoud Darwish's "Bitaqit Hawia": "Record! I am an Arab / Without a name — without title / patient in a country / with people enraged." And the second is Emil Habiby's invention the Pessoptimist (*al-mutasha'il*), the protagonist of a disorderly and ingenious work of Kafkaesque fiction, which has become a kind of national epic. The Pessoptimist is being half here, half not here, part historical creature, part mythological invention, hopeful and hopeless, everyone's favorite obsession and scapegoat. Is Habiby's character fiction, or does his extravagant fantasy only begin to approximate the real? Is he a made-up figure or the true essence of our existence? Is Habiby's jamming-together of words — *mutafa'il* and *mutasha'im* into *mutasha'il*, which repeats the Palestinian habit of combining opposites like *la* ("no") and *na'am* ("yes") into *la'am* — a way of obliterating distinctions that do not apply to us, yet must be integrated into our lives?

Emil Habiby is a craggy, uncompromisingly complex, and fearsomely ironic man from Haifa, son of a Christian family, Communist party stalwart, long-time Knesset member, journalist, editor. His novel about the Pessoptimist (whose first name, incidentally, is Said) is chaotic because it mixes time, characters, and places; fiction, allegory, history, and flat



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Bersheeba, 1979. Near a Bedouin encampment, a little kitchen garden — and its scarecrow of bits and pieces.

statement, without any thread to guide the reader through its complexities. It is the best work of Palestinian writing yet produced, precisely because the most seemingly disorganized and ironic. In it we encounter characters whose names are of particular significance to Palestinians: The name of Yuaad, the work's female lead, means "it shall be repeated," a reference to the string of defeats that mark our history, and the fatalistic formulae that color our discourse. One of the other characters is Isam al-Bathanjani — Isam the Eggplant, a lawyer who is not very helpful to Said but who keeps turning up just the same. So it is with eggplants in Palestine. My family — my father in particular — has always been attached to eggplants from Battir, and during the many years since any of us had Battiri eggplants the seal of approval on good eggplants was that "they're almost as good as the Battiris."

Today when I recall the tiresome paeans to Battiris, or when in London and Paris I see the same Jaffa oranges or Gaza vegetables grown in the *bayarat* ("orchards") and fields of my youth, but now marketed by Israeli export companies, the contrast between the inarticulate rich *thereness* of what we once knew and the systematic export of the produce into the hungry mouths of Europe strikes me with its unkind political message. The land and the peasants are bound together through work whose products seem always to have meant something to other people, to have been destined for consumption elsewhere. This observation holds force not just because the Carmel boxes and the carefully wrapped eggplants are emblems of the power that rules the sprawling fertility and enduring human labor of Palestine, but also because the discontinuity between me, out here, and the actuality there is so much more compelling now than my receding memories and experiences of Palestine.

Another, far more unusual, item concerning this vegetable appears in an article by Avigdor Feldman, "The New Order of the Military Government: State of Israel Against the Eggplant," which appeared in the journal *Koteret Rashit*, August 24, 1983. Laws 1015 and 1039, Feldman reports, stipulate that any Arab on the West Bank and Gaza who owns land must get written permission from the military governor before planting either a new vegetable — for example, an eggplant — or fruit tree. Failure to get permission risks one the destruction of the tree or vegetable plus one year's imprisonment.

Exile again. The facts of my birth are so distant and strange as to be about someone I've heard of rather than someone I know. Nazareth — my mother's town. Jerusalem — my father's. The pictures I see display the same produce, presented in the same care-

lessly plentiful way, in the same rough wooden cases. The same people walk by, looking at the same posters and trinkets, concealing the same secrets, searching for the same profits, pleasures,

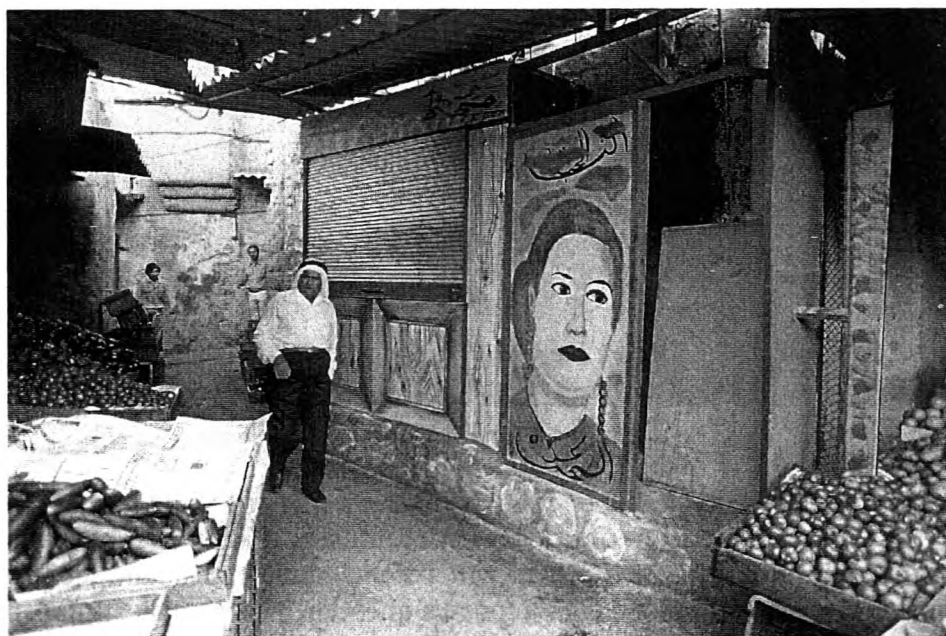
**EXILE AGAIN. THE FACTS OF MY BIRTH
ARE SO DISTANT AND STRANGE AS TO BE
ABOUT SOMEONE I'VE HEARD OF RATHER
THAN SOMEONE I KNOW.**



Gaza, 1979. Farm using refugee labor.

and goals. The same as what? There is little that I can truly remember about Jerusalem and Nazareth, little that is specific, little that has the irreducible durability of tactile, visual, or auditory memories that concede nothing to time, little — and this is the “same” I referred to — that is not confused with pictures I have seen or scenes I have glimpsed elsewhere in the Arab world.

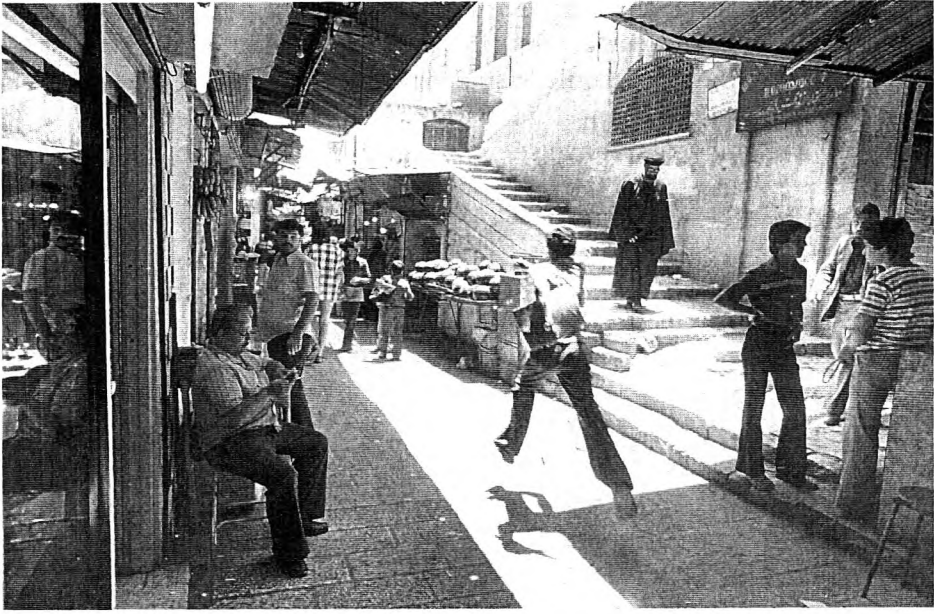
Palestine is exile, dispossession, the inaccurate memories of one place slipping into vague memories of another, a confused recovery of general wares, passive presences scattered around in the Arab environment. The story of Palestine cannot be told smoothly. Instead, the past, like the present, offers only occurrences and coincidences. Random. The man enters a quiet alley where he will pass cucumbers on his right, tomatoes on his left; a priest walks down the stairs, the boy dashes off, satchel under arm, other boys loiter, shopkeepers look out for business; carrying an airline bag, a man advances past a display of trinkets, a young man disappears around the corner, two boys idle aimlessly. Tomatoes, watermelons, arcades, cucumbers, posters, people, eggplants — not simply there, but represented by photographs as being there — saturated with meaning and memory, and still very far away. Look more closely and think through these possibilities: The poster is about Egypt. The trinkets are made in Korea or Hong Kong. The scenes are surveyed, enclosed, and surrounded by Israelis. European and Japanese tourists have more access to Jerusalem and Nazareth than I do. Slowly, our lives — like Palestine itself — dissolve into something else. We can't hold to the center for long.



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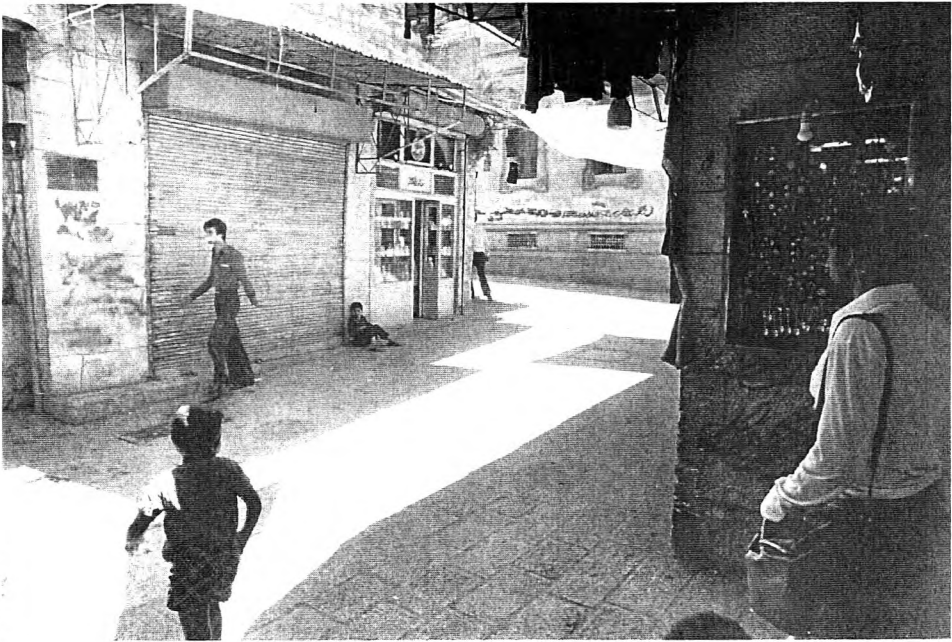
Nazareth, 1979. Portrait of Om Kalsoum.

© Jean Mohr



Jerusalem, 1979. A snapshot.

© Jean Mohr



Jerusalem, 1979. A snapshot.

Exile. At a recent conference in America featuring a "dialogue" between Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals with reconciliation high on the agenda, a man rises from the audience to pose a question. "I am a Palestinian, a peasant. Look at my hands. I was kicked out in 1948 and went to Lebanon. Then I was driven out, and went to Africa. Then to Europe. Then to here. Today [he pulls out an envelope] I received a paper telling me to leave this country. Would one of you scholars tell me please: Where am I



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Old City of Jerusalem, 1984. A tourist shop. Customers are rare. Will they be American, Swiss, or Israeli?

supposed to go now?" No one had anything to tell him. He was an embarrassment, and I have no idea what in fact he did, what became of him. My shame.

The Palestinian's claims on Israel are generally unacknowledged, much less seen as directly connected to the founding of the state. On the Arabs there is an ambivalent Palestinian claim, recognized in Arab countries by countless words, gestures, threats, and promises. Palestine, after all, is the centerpiece of Arab nationalism. No Arab leader since World

© Jean Mohr



Jerusalem, 1979.

War II has failed to make Palestine a symbol of his country's nationalist foreign policy. Yet, despite the avowals, we have no way of knowing really how they — all the "theys" — feel about us. Our history has cost every one of our friends a great deal. It has gone on too long.

Let Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* stand for the fear we have that unless we press "them" they will allow us to disappear, and the equal worry that if we press them they will either decry our hectoring presence, and quash it in their states, or turn us into easy symbols of their nationalism. Three refugees concealed in the belly of a tanker truck are being transported illegally across the border into Kuwait. As the driver converses with the guards, the men (Palestinians) die of suffocation — in the sun, forgotten. It is not the driver's forgetfulness that nags at him. It is their silence. "Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?" Our fear to press.

The Palestinians as commodity. Producing ourselves much as the *masabih*, lamps, tapestries, baskets, embroideries, mother-of-pearl trinkets are produced. We turn ourselves into objects not for sale, but for scrutiny. People ask us, as if looking into an exhibit case, "What is it you Palestinians want?" — as if we can put our demands into a single neat phrase. All of us speak of *awdah*, "return," but do we mean that literally, or do we mean "we must restore ourselves to ourselves"? The latter is the real point, I think, although I know many Palestinians who want their houses and their way of life back, exactly. But is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences?

Do we exist? What proof do we have?

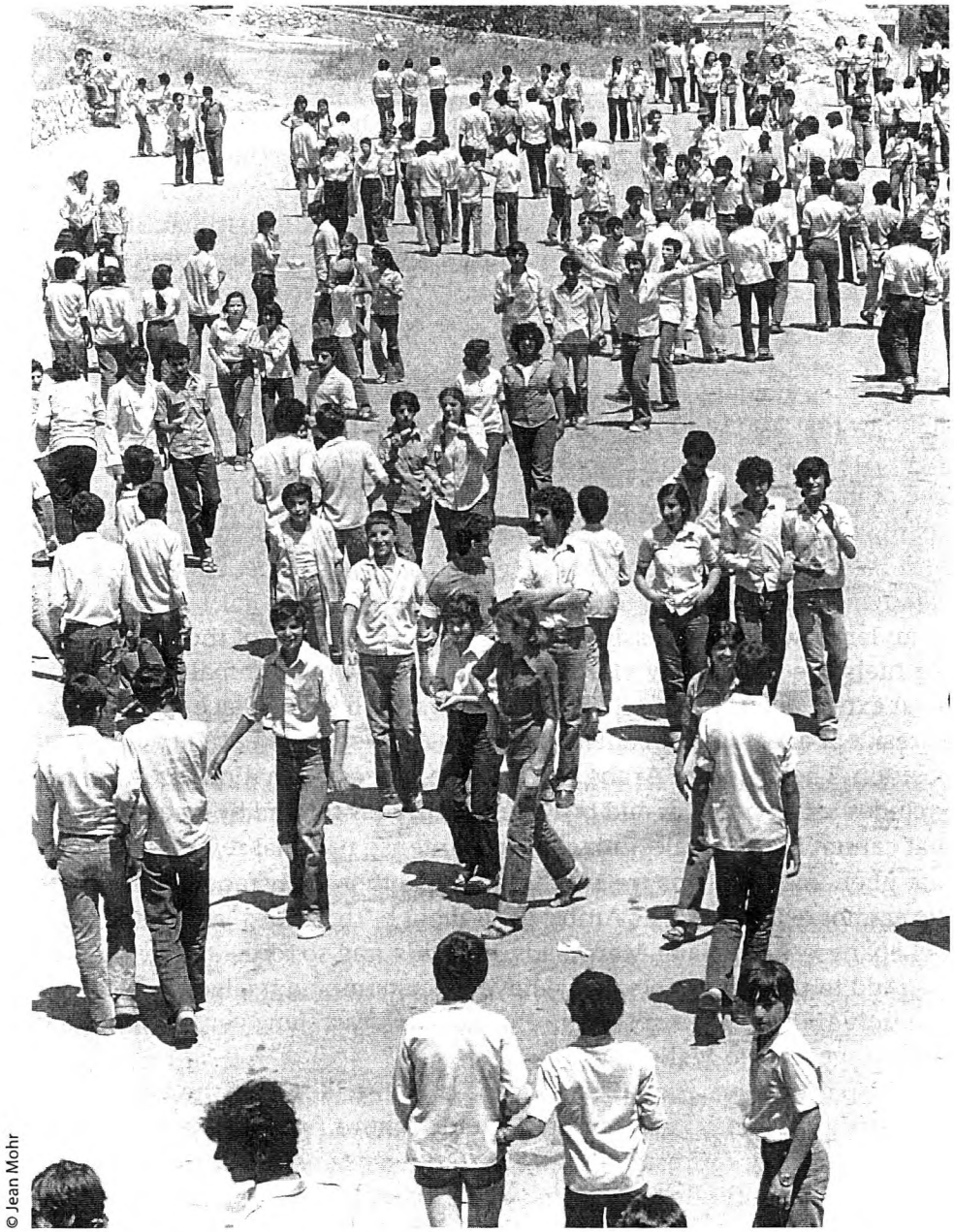
The further we get from the Palestine of our past, the more precarious our status, the more disrupted our being, the more intermittent our presence. When did we become "a people"? When did we stop being one? Or are we in the process of becoming one? What do those big questions have to do with our intimate relationships with each other and with others? We frequently end our letters with the mottoes "Palestinian love" or "Palestinian kisses." Are there really such things as Palestinian intimacy and embraces, or are they simply intimacy and embraces, experiences common to everyone, neither politically significant nor particular to a nation or a people?

The politics of such a question gets very close to our central dilemma: We all know that we are Arabs, and yet the concept, not to say the lived actuality, of Arabism — once the creed and the discourse of a proud Arab nation, free of imperialism, united, respected, powerful — is fast disappearing, cut up into the cautious defensiveness of relatively provincial Arab states, each with its own traditions — partly invented, partly real — each with its own nationality and restricted identity. In addition, Palestine has been replaced by an Israel whose aggressive sense of itself as the state of the Jewish people fuels the exclusivity of a national identity won and maintained to a great extent at our expense. We are not Jews, we have no place there except as resident aliens, we are outsiders. In the Arab states we are in a different position. There we are Arabs, but it is the process of nationalization that excludes us: Egypt is for and by Egyptians, Iraq is for and by Iraqis, in ways that cannot include Palestinians whose intense national revival is a separate phenomenon. Thus we are the same as other Arabs, and yet different. We cannot exist except as Arabs, even though "the Arabs" exist otherwise as Lebanese, Jordanians, Moroccans, Kuwaitis, and so forth.

Add to this the problems we have of sustaining ourselves as a collective unit and you then get a sense of how *abstract*, how very solitary and unique, we tend to feel.

Strip off the occasional assertiveness and stridency of the Palestinian stance and you may catch sight of a much more fugitive, but ultimately quite beautifully representative and subtle, sense of identity. It speaks in languages not yet fully formed, in settings not completely constituted, like the shy glance of a child holding her father's knee while she curiously and tentatively examines the stranger who photographs her. Her look conjures up the unappreciated fact of birth, that sudden, unprepared-for depositing of a small bundle of self on the fields of the Levant after which comes the trajectory of dispossession, military and political violence, and that constant, mysterious entanglement with monotheistic religion at its most profound — the Christian Incarnation and Resurrection, the Ascension to heaven of the Prophet Mohammed, the Covenant of Yahweh with his people — that is knotted definitively in Jerusalem, center of the world, *locus classicus* of Palestine, Israel, and Paradise.

A secular world of fatigue and miraculously renewed energies, the world of American cigarettes and an unending stream of small papers



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Village of Ramah, Galilee, 1979. A secular high school with students from thirty-six neighboring villages.

pulled out of miscellaneous notebooks or "blocnotes," written on with disposable pens, messages of things wanted, of people missing, of requests to the bureaucracy. The Palestinian predicament: finding an "official" place for yourself in a system that makes no allowances for you, which means endlessly improvising solutions for the problem of finding a missing loved one, of planning a trip, of entering a school, on whatever bit of paper is at hand. Constructed and deconstructed, ephemera are what we



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Amman, 1984. Pediatric clinic.

negotiate with, since we authorize no part of the world and only influence increasingly small bits of it. In any case, we keep going.

The striking thing about Palestinian prose and prose fiction is its formal instability: Our literature in a certain very narrow sense *is* the elusive, resistant reality it tries so often to represent. Most literary critics in Israel and the West focus on what is said in Palestinian writing, who is described, what the plot and contents deliver, their sociological and political meaning. But it is *form* that should be looked at. Particularly in fiction,



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Sidon, South Lebanon, 1983. A refugee writes out a message destined for her husband, a prisoner in the camp at Ansar.

the struggle to achieve form expresses the writer's efforts to construct a coherent scene, a narrative that might overcome the almost metaphysical impossibility of representing the present. A typical Palestinian work will always be concerned with this peculiar problem, which is at once a problem of plot and an enactment of the writer's enterprise. In Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* much of the action takes place on the dusty streets of an Iraqi town where three Palestinian men must petition, plead, and bargain with "specialists" to smuggle them across the border into Kuwait. Impelled by

exile and dislocation, the Palestinians need to carve a path for themselves in existence, which for them is by no means a given or stable reality. Like the history of the lands they left, their lives seem interrupted just before they could come to maturity and satisfaction; thus each man leaves behind family and responsibilities, to whose exigencies he must answer — unsuccessfully — here in the present. Kanafani's very sentences express instability and fluctuation — the present tense is subject to echoes from the past, verbs of sight give way to verbs of sound or smell, and one sense interweaves with another — in an effort to defend against the harsh present and to protect some particularly cherished fragment of the past. Thus, the precarious actuality of these men in the sun reproduces the precarious status of the writer, each echoing the other.

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Each Palestinian structure presents itself as a potential ruin. The theme of the formerly proud family house (village, city, camp) now wrecked, left behind, or owned by someone else, turns up everywhere in our literature and cultural heritage. Each new house is a substitute, supplanted in turn by yet another substitute. The names of these places extend all the way from the private (my friend Mohammed Tarbush expatiates nobly on the beauties of Beit Natif, a village near Bethlehem that was wiped out of existence by Israeli bulldozers in 1948; his widowed mother now lives in Jarash, Jordan, he in Paris) to the official, or institutionalized, sites of ruin — Deir Yassin, Tell el-Zaatar, Birim and Ikrit, Ein el-Hilwé, Sabra, Shatila, and more. Even "Palestine" itself is such a place and, curiously, already appears as a subject of elegy in journalism, essays, and literature of the early twentieth century. In the works of Halim Nassar, Ezzat Darwaza, Khallil Beidas, and Aref el-Aref, Palestine's destruction is predicted.

All cultures spin out a dialectic of self and other, the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object "it" or "you," who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there. From this dialectic comes the series of heroes and monsters, founding fathers and barbarians, prized masterpieces and despised opponents that express a culture from its deepest sense of national self-identity to its refined patriotism, and finally to its coarse jingoism, xenophobia, and exclusivist bias. For Palestinian culture, the odd thing is that its own identity is more frequently than not perceived as "other." "Palestine" is so charged with significance for others that Palestinians cannot perceive it as intimately theirs without a simultaneous sense of its urgent importance for others as well. "Ours" but not

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Sidon, South Lebanon, 1983. Camp at Ein el-Hilwé. Time passes: destruction, reconstruction, redestruction.

yet fully "ours." Before 1948, Palestine had a central agonistic meaning both for Arab nationalism and for the Zionist movement. After 1948, the parts of Palestine still inhabited by Arabs took on the additional label of the "non-Jewish" part of the Jewish state. Even a picture of an Arab town — like Nazareth where my mother was born and grew up — may express this alienating perspective. Because it is taken from outside Nazareth (in fact, from Upper Nazareth, a totally Jewish addition to the town, built on the surrounding hills), the photograph renders Palestine as "other." I never knew Nazareth, so this is my only image of it, an image of the "other," from the "outside," Upper Nazareth.

Thus the insider becomes the outsider. Not only have the interpositions between us and Palestine grown more formidable over time, but, to make matters worse, most of us pass our lives separated from each other. Yet we live in comradely communication despite the barriers. Today the Palestinian genius expresses itself in crossings-over, in clearing hurdles, activities that do not lessen the alienation, discontinuity, and dispossession, but that dramatize and clarify them instead. We have remained; in the words of Tawfik Zayyad's famous poem, "The Twenty Impossibles," it would be easier "to catch fried fish in the Milky Way, / to plow the sea, / to teach the alligator speech" than to make us leave. To the Israelis, whose incomparable military and political power dominates us, we are at the periphery, the image that will not go away. Every assertion of our non-existence, every attempt to spirit us away, every new effort to prove that we were never really there, simply raises the question of why so much



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Arab Nazareth, 1979. Viewed from Upper Nazareth.

denial of, and such energy expended on, what was not there? Could it be that even as alien outsiders we dog their military might with our obdurate moral claim, our insistence (like that of *Bartleby the Scrivener*) that “we would prefer not to,” not to leave, not to abandon Palestine forever?

The proof of whatever small success we have had is not that we have regained a homeland, or acquired a new one; rather, it is that some Israelis have admitted the possibility of sharing a common space with us, in Palestine. The proposed modes of such a sharing are adventurous and utopian in the present context of hostility between Arabs and Jews, but on an intellectual level they are actual, and to some of us — on both sides — they make sense. Most Palestinians have their own special instance of the Israeli who reached out across the barricade most humanly. For some it is the intrepid Israeli lawyer defending Palestinian political prisoners, or trying to prevent land expropriations and collective punishment; for others it is — the testimony of Salah Ta’amari, leader of the Palestinian prisoners rounded up during the Israeli invasion and put in the Ansar prison camp, comes to mind — an Israeli in a position of authority (prison guard or army officer) who prevented some atrocity or showed some clear sign of humanity and fellow feeling. For my part, removed from the terrible pressures of the scene, I think of all the Israeli (or non-Israeli) Jews whose articulate witness to the injustice of their people against mine has marked out a communal territory. The result has usually been a friendship whose depth is directly proportional to the admiration I feel for their tenacity of conscience and belief in the face of the most slanderous attacks. Surely few have equaled the courage and principle of Israel Shahak, of Leah Tsemal and Felicia Langer, of Noam Chomsky, of Izzy Stone, of Elmer Berger, of Matti Peled, of so many others who stood up bravely during the events in Lebanon.



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Tyre, South Lebanon, 1983. Rashidyé camp: A local official collects messages from the relations of refugees for the International Red Cross.

There are few opportunities for us Palestinians, or us Palestinians *and* Israelis, to learn anything about the world we live in that is *not* touched by, indeed soaked in, the hostilities of our struggle. And if it isn't the Palestinian-Zionist struggle, there are the pressures of religion, of every conceivable ideology, of family, peers, and compatriots, each of them bearing down upon us, pushing, kneading, prodding every one of us from childhood to maturity.

In such an environment, learning itself is a chancy, hybrid activity, laced with the unresolvable antitheses of our age. The child is full of the curious hope and undirected energy that attract the curatorial powers of both church and state. Fortunately, here the spirit of the creative urge in



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Kalandia (near Ramallah), 1967. A few days after the end of the June War: in the foreground, an Israeli officer, lost in thought. Behind the window, a young villager.

all human activity asserts itself — neither church nor state can ultimately exhaust, or control, the possibilities latent in the classroom, playground, or family. An orderly row of chairs and tables, a disciplined recitation circle in a Catholic school with a nun in charge, are also places for the absorption of more knowledge and experience than authorities impart — places where the child explores here and there, his / her mind and body wandering in space and time despite the constraints in each. In a school where the teacher is a devout Muslim, the child's propensity for disturbing or opposing the schemes of knowledge and discipline causes him / her to leave the table, disrupt the pattern, seek unthought-of possibilities. The tension between teachers and students remains, but better the tension than the peace of passivity, or the unresisting assent to authority.



© Jean Mohr

Jerusalem, 1979. A dialogue between left-wing Israeli and Arab intellectuals.

The pressures of the here and now require an answer to the Palestinian crisis here and now. Whereas our interlocutors, our "others" — the Arab states, the United States, the USSR, Israel, our friends and enemies — have the luxury of a state in which institutions do their work undisturbed by the question of existence-or-not, we lead our lives under a sword of Damocles, whose dry rhetorical form is the query "When are you Palestinians going to accept a solution?" — the implication being that if we don't, we'll disappear. This, then, is our midnight hour.

It is difficult to know how much the often stated, tediously reiterated worries about us, which include endless lectures on the need for a clear Palestinian statement of the desire for peace (as if we controlled the decisive factors!), are malicious provocation and how much genuine, if sympathetic, ignorance. I don't think any of us reacts as impatiently to such things as we did, say, five years ago. True, our collective situation is more precarious now than it was, but I detect a general turning inward among Palestinians, as if many of us feel the need to consolidate and collect the shards of Palestinian life still present and available to us. This is not quietism at all, nor is it resignation. Rather, it springs from the natural impulse to stand back when the headlong rush of events gets to be too much, perhaps, for us to savor life as life, to reflect at some distance from politics on where we came from and where we are, to regasp, revise, recomprehend the tumultuous experiences at whose center, quite without our consent, we have been made to stand.

Jean Mohr's photograph [p. 556] of a small but clearly formed human group surrounded by a dense and layered reality expresses very well what we experience during that detachment from an ideologically saturated world. This image of four people seen at a distance near Ramallah,



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Nazareth, 1979. A municipal kindergarten, looked after by nuns.

in the middle of and yet separated from thick foliage, stairs, several tiers of terraces and houses, a lone electricity pole off to the right, is for me a private, crystallized, almost Proustian evocation of Palestine. Memory: During the summer of 1942 — I was six — we rented a house in Ramallah. My father, I recall, was ill with high blood pressure and recovering from a nervous breakdown. I remember him as withdrawn and constantly smoking. My mother took me to a variety show at the local Friends school. During the second half I left the hall to go to the toilet, but for reasons I could not (and still do not) grasp, the boy-scout usher would not let me back in. I recall with ever-renewed poignancy the sudden sense of distance I experienced from what was familiar and pleasant — my mother, friends, the show; all at once the rift introduced into the cozy life I led

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Amman, 1984. Camp at Baqa'a, one of the oldest in Jordan. The YWCA looks after some of the kindergartens.



Jerusalem, 1984.

taught me the meaning of separation, of solitude, and of anguished boredom. There was nothing to do but wait, although my mother did appear a little later to find out what had happened to me. We left immediately, but not before I furtively took a quick look back through the door window at the lighted stage. The telescoped vision of small figures assembled in a detached space has remained with me for over forty years, and it reappears in the adjusted and transformed center of Jean's 1983 picture. I never ventured anywhere near that part of Ramallah again. I would no more know it than I would the precise place of this photo; and yet I am sure it would be familiar, the way this one immediately seemed.

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My private past is inscribed on the surface of this peaceful but somehow brooding pastoral scene in the contemporary West Bank. I am not the only one surveying the scene. There is the child on the left who looks on. There are also the Swiss photographer, compassionate, curious, silent, and of course the ever-present Israeli security services, who hold the West Bank and its population in the vise of occupation. As for those terraces and multiple levels: Do they serve the activities of daily life or are they the haunted stairs of a prison which, like Piranesi's, lead nowhere, confining their human captives? The dense mass of leaves, right and left, lend their bulk to the frame, but they too impinge on the slender life they

© Jean Mohr



Near Senjel, a village between Ramallah and Nablus, 1979.

surround, like memory or a history too complex to be sorted out, bigger than its subject, richer than any consciousness one might have of it.

The power grid recalls the Mercedes in Tripoli. Unassimilated, its modernity and power have been felt with considerable strength in our lives here and there throughout the Third World. Another childhood memory: Driving through the Sinai from Egypt into Palestine, we would see the row of telephone and electricity pylons partnering the empty macadamized road that cut through an even emptier desert. Who are they, I would ask myself. What do they think when we are not here? When we stopped to stretch our legs, I would go up to a pole and look at its dull brown surface for some sign of life, identity, or awareness. Once I marked one with my initials EWS, hoping to find it again on the trip back. All of them looked exactly the same as we hurtled by. We never stopped. I never drove there again, nor can I now. Futile efforts to register my presence on the scene.

Intimate memory and contemporary social reality seem connected by the little passage between the child, absorbed in his private, silent sphere, and the three older people, who are the public world of adults, work, and community. It is a vacant, somewhat tenuously maintained space, however; sandy, pebbly, and weedy. All the force in the photograph moves dramatically from trees left to trees right, from the visible enclave of domesticity (stairs, houses, terrace) to the unseen larger world of power

and authority beyond. I wonder whether the four people are in fact connected, or whether as a group they simply happen to be in the way of unseen forces totally indifferent to the dwelling and living space these people inhabit. This is also, then, a photograph of latent, of impending desolation, and once again I am depressed by the transience of Palestinian life, its vulnerability and all too easy dislocation. But another movement, another feeling, asserts itself in response, set in motion by the two strikingly marked openings in the buildings, openings that suggest rich, cool interiors which outsiders cannot penetrate. Let us enter.

• • • • •

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. The first three paragraphs provide a "reading" of the opening photograph, "Tripoli, Badawi camp, May 1983." Or, to put it another way, the writing evolves from and is in response to that photograph. As you reread these paragraphs, pay close attention to what Said is doing, to what he notices, to what prompts or requires commentary. How would you describe and explain the writing that follows? What is he doing with the photo? What is he doing as a writer? What is he doing for a reader? (How does he position a reader?)

It might be useful to begin by thinking about what Said is not doing. It is not, for example, the presentation one might expect in a slide show on travel in Lebanon. Nor is it the kind of presentation one might expect while seeing the slides of family or friends, or slides in an art history or art appreciation class.

Once you have worked through the opening three paragraphs, reread the essay paying attention to Said's work with all the photographs. Is there a pattern? Do any of the commentaries stand out for their force, variety, innovation?

2. Here is another passage from the introduction to *After the Last Sky*:

Its style and method — the interplay of text and photos, the mixture of genres, modes, styles — do not tell a consecutive story, nor do they constitute a political essay. Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us. What I have quite consciously designed, then, is an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction. (p. 6)

And later:

The multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. Stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable either to speak the "truth" of our experience or to make it heard. We do not

usually control the images that represent us; we have been confined to spaces designed to reduce or stunt us; and we have often been distorted by pressures and powers that have been too much for us. An additional problem is that our language, Arabic, is unfamiliar in the West and belongs to a tradition and civilization usually both misunderstood and maligned. Everything we write about ourselves, therefore, is an interpretive translation — of our language, our experience, our senses of self and others. (p. 6)

And from "States":

The striking thing about Palestinian prose and prose fiction is its formal instability: Our literature in a certain very narrow sense *is* the elusive, resistant reality it tries so often to represent. Most literary critics in Israel and the West focus on what is said in Palestinian writing, who is described, what the plot and contents deliver, their sociological and political meaning. But it is *form* that should be looked at. Particularly in fiction, the struggle to achieve form expresses the writer's efforts to construct a coherent scene, a narrative that might overcome the almost metaphysical impossibility of representing the present. (pp. 545–46)

As you reread, think about form — organization, arrangement, and genre. What is the order of the writing in this essay? (We will call it an essay for lack of a better term.) How might you diagram or explain its organization? By what principle(s) is it ordered and arranged? The essay shifts genres — memoir, history, argument. It is, as Said says, "hybrid." What surprises are there? or disappointments? How might you describe the writer's strategy as he works on his audience, on readers? And, finally, do you find Said's explanation sufficient or useful — does the experience of exile produce its own inevitable style of report and representation?

3. The essay is filled with references to people (including writers), places, and events that are, most likely, foreign to you. Choose one that seems interesting or important, worth devoting time to research. Of course the Internet will be a resource, but you should also use the library, if only to become aware of the different opportunities and materials it provides. Compile a report of the additional information; be prepared to discuss how the research has served or changed your position as a reader of "States."
4. The final chapter of *After the Last Sky* ends with this:

I would like to think, though, that such a book not only tells the reader about us, but in some way also reads the reader. I would like to think that we are not just the people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers. (p. 166)

Read back through Said's essay by looking at the photos with this reversal in mind — looking in order to see yourself as the one who is being looked at, as the one observed. How are you positioned by the photographer, Jean Mohr?

How are you positioned by the person in the scene, always acknowledging your presence? What are you being told?

Once you have looked through the photographs, reread the essay with a similar question in mind. This time, however, look for evidence of how Said positions you, defines you, invents you as a presence in the scene.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. Compose a similar project, a Said-like reading of a set of photos. These can be photos prepared for the occasion (by you or a colleague); they could also be photos already available. Whatever their source, they should represent people and places, a history and/or geography that you know well, that you know to be complex and contradictory, and that you know will not be easily or readily understood by others, both the group for whom you will be writing (most usefully the members of your class) and readers more generally. You must begin with a sense that the photos cannot speak for themselves; you must speak for them.

In preparation, you should reread closely to come to a careful understanding of Said's project. (The first and second "Questions for a Second Reading" should be useful for this.) To prepare a document that is Said-like (one that shows your understanding of what Said is doing), you will need an expert's sense of how to write from and to photographs, and you will need to consider questions of form — of order, arrangement, and genre.

2. While "States" does not present itself as polemical writing — an argument in defense of Palestinian rights, an argument designed to locate blame or propose national or international policy — it is, still, writing with a purpose. It has an argument, it has a particular project in mind, and it wants something to happen.

Write an essay that represents the argument or the project of "States" for someone who has not read it. You will need, in other words, to establish a context and to summarize. You should also work from passages (and images) to give your reader a sense of the text, its key terms and language. And write about "States" as though it has something to do with you.

Your essay is not just summary, in other words, but summary in service of statement, response, or extension. As you are invited to think about the Palestinians, or about exile more generally, or about the texts and images that are commonly available, what do you think? What do you have to add?

3. The final chapter of *After the Last Sky* ends with this:

I would like to think, though, that such a book not only tells the reader about us, but in some way also reads the reader. I would like to think that we are not just the people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers. (p. 166)

The fourth question in “Questions for a Second Reading” sets a strategy for rereading with this passage in mind — looking in order to see yourself as the one who is being looked at, as the one observed. Write an essay in which you think this through by referring specifically to images and to text. How are you positioned? by whom and to what end?

4. Said insists upon our recognizing the contemporary social, political, and historical context for intimate scenes he (and Jean Mohr) present of people going about their everyday lives. The Palestinian people are still much in the news — photographs of scenes from their lives are featured regularly in newspapers, in magazines, and on the Internet. Collect a series of these images from a particular and defined recent period of time — a week or a month, say, when the Palestinians have been in the news. Using these images, and putting them in conversation with some of the passages and images in “States,” write an essay in the manner of Said’s essay, with text and image in productive relationship. The goal of your essay should be to examine how Said’s work, in “States,” can speak to us (or might speak to us) today.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Edward Said talks about the formal problems in the writing of “States” (and for more on this, see the second of the “Questions for a Second Reading”):

The striking thing about Palestinian prose and prose fiction is its formal instability: Our literature in a certain very narrow sense *is* the elusive, resistant reality it tries so often to represent. Most literary critics in Israel and the West focus on what is said in Palestinian writing, who is described, what the plot and contents deliver, their sociological and political meaning. But it is form that should be looked at. Particularly in fiction, the struggle to achieve *form* expresses the writer’s efforts to construct a coherent scene, a narrative that might overcome the almost metaphysical impossibility of representing the present. (pp. 545–46)

And here is a similar discussion from the introduction to *After the Last Sky*:

The multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. Stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable either to speak the “truth” of our experience or to make it heard. We do not usually control the images that represent us; we have been confined to spaces designed to reduce or stunt us; and we have often been distorted by pressures and powers that have been too much for us. An additional problem is that our language, Arabic, is unfamiliar in the West and belongs to a tradition and civilization usually both misunderstood and maligned. Everything we write about ourselves,

therefore, is an interpretive translation — of our language, our experience, our senses of self and others. (p. 6)

Edward Said's sense of his project as a writing project, a writing project requiring formal experimentation, is similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In the chapter represented in *Ways of Reading*, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (p. 22), Anzaldúa is also writing (and resisting) "interpretive translation." In place of the photographs in "States," she offers poems, stories, and myths, as well as passages in Spanish.

Write an essay in which you consider these selections as writing projects. The formal experimentation in each is said by the writers to be fundamental, necessary, a product of the distance between a particular world of experience and the available modes of representation. In what ways are the essays similar? In what ways are they different? Where and how is a reader (where and how are you) positioned in each? What is the experience of reading them? What does one need to learn to be their ideal reader?

2. Edward Said says,

All cultures spin out a dialectic of self and other, the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object "it" or "you," who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there. From this dialectic comes the series of heroes and monsters, founding fathers and barbarians, prized masterpieces and despised opponents that express a culture from its deepest sense of national self-identity to its refined patriotism, and finally to its coarse jingoism, xenophobia, and exclusivist bias. (p. 547)

This is as true of the Palestinians as it is of the Israelis — although, he adds, "For Palestinian culture, the odd thing is that its own identity is more frequently than not perceived as 'other.'"

Citing Benedict Anderson and what he refers to as "imagined communities," Mary Louise Pratt in "Arts of the Contact Zone" (p. 454) argues that our idea of community is "strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize" (p. 462). Against this utopian vision of community, Pratt argues that we need to develop ways of understanding (noticing or creating) social and intellectual spaces that are not homogeneous or unified — contact zones. She argues that we need to develop ways of understanding and valuing difference.

There are similar goals and objects to these projects. Reread Pratt's essay with Said's "States" in mind. Recalling what she refers to as the "literate arts of the contact zone," can you find points of reference in Said's text? Said's thinking always attends to the importance and the conditions of writing, including his own. There are ways that "States" could be imagined as both "autoethnographic" and "transcultural." How might his work allow you to understand the "literate arts of the contact zone" in practice? How might his work allow you to understand the problems and possibilities of such writing beyond what Pratt has imagined, presented, and predicted?

3. Jean Mohr's collaboration with John Berger was important to Edward Said, particularly in the 1975 book *A Seventh Man*, a photographic essay on migrant workers in Europe. Find a copy of *A Seventh Man* (in a library, a bookstore, or online) and write an essay on what you think it was in Mohr's work, and in his collaboration with Berger, that was most compelling to Said.
4. In Edward Said's essay "States," he theorizes about the notion of exile in relation to Palestinian identity, offering a study of exile and dislocation through his analysis of photographs taken by Jean Mohr. Consider the following passage:

We turn ourselves into objects not for sale, but for scrutiny. People ask us, as if looking into an exhibit case, "What is it you Palestinians want?" — as if we can put our demands into a single neat phrase. All of us speak of *awdah*, "return," but do we mean that literally, or do we mean "we must restore ourselves to ourselves"? (p. 542)

When Said talks about being looked at as though in an exhibit case, we might understand him as being concerned with the problem of dehumanization. After all, to be in an exhibit case is to be captured, trapped, or even dead. In her essay "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" (p. 182), Judith Butler might be understood to be considering a similar problem. She writes, "I would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life?" (p. 182).

Write an essay in which you consider the ways Said and Butler might be said to be speaking with each other. How might the condition of exile be like the condition of being beside oneself? What kind of connections — whether you see them as productive or problematic, or both at once — can be made between the ways Said talks about nation, identity, and home, and the ways Butler talks about gender and sexuality? What passages from each seem to have the other in mind? How does each struggle with reference, with pronouns like "we" and "our"?

5. Like Edward Said in "States," Ta-Nehisi Coates includes photographs in "Between the World and Me" (p. 242). (One image is included in our selection. You might look through a copy of the book *Between the World and Me* at your library to see the others.) Both Said and Coates are trying to represent a world — present, past, and future — and both rely on visual images. Write an essay in which you consider the different uses of the photograph in these two selections. How do they function for you, as a reader? What do you imagine the authors had in mind when they selected these images and brought them into the text?

SOLMAZ Sharif



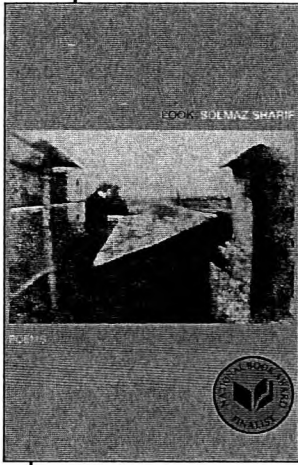
Arash Saedinia

Solmaz Sharif (b. 1983), in an interview with *The Paris Review*, describes her poetry as “political,” then “documentary,” aiming to trouble the widely held belief that politically engaged poetry cannot also be beautiful in its form and language. She says, “It’s exciting for me to think of poets that are allowing their politics to also be shaped by these aesthetic considerations, and wondering when the poetic will lead you to the kind of political surprise that a dogmatic approach wouldn’t allow. These are the artists that live on the fringes of what is aesthetically and politically accepted.” Sharif’s debut poetry collection, *Look* (2016), reimagines the humanity of warfare, placing language from the *Department of Defense of Military and Associated Terms* (a text that details the agreed upon terminology for general use by Department of Defense) alongside personal narrative, creating carefully crafted images of the person before and behind the gun. *Look* was a finalist for the 2016 National Book Award and the 2017 PEN Open Book Award.

Sharif was born in Istanbul and is of Iranian heritage, but spent her early years moving throughout the United States as her parents pursued educational opportunities. Moving through these multiple spaces deeply affected her art. “No matter where I went, I was outside of whatever community I found myself in, so that even when I arrived in a place where there was a lot of ‘me,’ I was totally outside again. That probably influenced my artistic impulse . . . to stand outside of and look into, and constantly question and interrogate the collectives that exist.” Her lived experience on the margins comes through in her writing as Sharif dares us to misunderstand war, its geographic and generational impact, as well as the people who march across sand and soil, following orders.

Sharif has received degrees from The University of California at Berkeley and from NYU. She currently teaches at Stanford University and previously served as the director of the Asian American Writers Workshop. Sharif has received the 2016 Lannan Literary Fellowship as well as the Holmes National Poetry Prize from Princeton University, and her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Poetry*, *Granta*, *The New Republic*, and *The Kenyon Review*.

Sharif considers herself a poet who stands on the shoulders of those who came before her, namely June Jordan, whose Poetry for the People she studied and taught from at Berkeley, and who, like Sharif, wrote profoundly



activist and personal poetry that was at once topically complex and linguistically accessible, poetry that reached, always, for women's and civil rights. Sharif says, "The lyric self is the political weapon I have as a poet. My subjectivity is maybe the most potent force I have in interacting politically on the page."

.....

Look

It matters what you call a thing: *Exquisite* a lover called me.
Exquisite.

Whereas *Well, if I were from your culture, living in this country,*
said the man outside the 2004 Republican National
Convention, *I would put up with that for this country;*

Whereas I felt the need to clarify: *You would put up with*
TORTURE, you mean and he proclaimed: *Yes;*

Whereas what is your life;

Whereas years after they LOOK down from their jets
and declare my mother's Abadan block PROBABLY
DESTROYED, we walked by the villas, the faces
of buildings torn off into dioramas, and recorded it
on a handheld camcorder;

Whereas it could take as long as 16 seconds between
the trigger pulled to Las Vegas and the Hellfire missile
landing in Mazar-e-Sharif, after which they will ask
Did we hit a child? No. A dog, they will answer themselves;

Whereas the federal judge at the sentencing hearing said
I want to make sure I pronounce the defendant's name
correctly;

Whereas this lover would pronounce my name and call me
Exquisite and lay the floor lamp across the floor,
softening even the light;

Whereas the lover made my heat rise, rise so chat if
heat sensors were trained on me, they could read
my THERMAL SHADOW through the roof and through
the wardrobe;

Whereas *you know we ran into like groups like mass executions. w/ hands tied behind their backs, and everybody shot in the head side by side, its not like seeing a dead body walking to the grocery store here, its not like that, its iraq you know its iraq, its kinda like acceptable to see that there and not—it was kinda like seeing a dead dog or a dead cat lying—;*

Whereas I thought if he would LOOK at my exquisite face or my father's, he would reconsider;

Whereas *You mean I should be disappeared because of my family name?* and he answered *Yes. That's exactly what I mean,* adding that his wife helped draft the PATRIOT Act;

Whereas the federal judge wanted to be sure he was pronouncing the defendant's name correctly and said he had read all the exhibits, which included the letter I wrote to cast the defendant in a loving light;

Whereas today we celebrate things like his transfer to a detention center closer to home;

Whereas his son has moved across the country;

Whereas I made nothing happen;

Whereas *ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life?* It is even a THERMAL SHADOW; it appears so little, and then vanishes from the screen;

Whereas I cannot control my own heat and it can take as long as 16 seconds between the trigger, the Hellfire missile, and *A dog*, they will answer themselves;

Whereas *A dog*, they will say: Now, therefore,

Let it matter what we call a thing.

Let it be the exquisite face for at least 16 seconds.

Let me LOOK at you.

Let me LOOK at you in a light that takes years to get here.

During the war, we felt the silence in the policy of the governments of English-speaking countries. That policy was to win the war first, and work out the meanings afterward. The result was, of course, that the meanings were lost.

—MURIEL RUKEYSER

BATTLEFIELD ILLUMINATION on fire
a body running

PINPOINT TARGET one lit desk lamp
and a nightgown walking past the window

LAY down
 to sleep then
 to rest last night
 to waste before
 across a stretcher
 across a shoulder
 over a leg
 beneath an arm
 in a shroud
 in a crib
 on top of a car
 chained to a bumper
 beneath a bridge
 in town square
 in the fountain
 in the Tigris
 under water boiled from smart bombs
 in a cellar
 in backseat counting streetlamps strobing overhead
 under bomblets
 under tendrils of phosphorus
 in a burnt silhouette
 on a cot
 under a tent
 still Holding your breath
 beneath dining table
 beneath five stories
 in a hole

ONTAMINATED REMAINS	wash hands before getting in bed leave interrogation room before answering cell teach your mouth to say <i>honey</i> when you enter the kitchen
DAMAGE AREA	does not include night sweats or retching at the smell of barbeque
DEAD SPACE	fridges full after the explosion the hospital places body parts our back where crowds attempt to identify those who do not answer their calls by an eyeball a sleeve of a favorite shirt a stopped wristwatch
DESTRUCTION RADIUS	limited to blast site and not the brother abroad who answers his phone then falls against the counter or punches a cabinet door

SAFE HOUSE

SANCTUARY where we don't have to

SANITIZE hands or words or knives, don't have to use a

SCALE each morning, worried we take up too much space. I

SCAN my memory of baba talking on

SCREEN answering a question (*how are you?*) I would ask and ask from behind the camera, his face changing with each repetition as he tried to watch the football game. He doesn't know this is the beginning of my

SCRIBING life: repetition and change. A human face at the seaport and a home growing smaller. Let's

SEARCH my father's profile: moustache black and holding back a

SECRET he still hasn't told me,

SECTION of the couch that's fallen a bit from his repeated weight,

SECTOR of the government designed to keep him from flying. He kept our house

SECURE except from the little bugs that come with dried herbs from Iran. He gives

SECURITY officers a reason to get off their chairs. My father is not afraid of

SEDITION. He can

SEIZE a wild pigeon off a Santa Monica street or watch

SEIZURES unfold in his sister's bedroom—the FBI storming through. He said *use wood sticks to hold up your protest signs then use them in*

SELF-DEFENSE *when the horses come*, his eyes

SENSITIVE when he passes advice to me, like I'm his

SEQUEL, like we're all a

SERIAL caught on Iranian satellite TV. When you tell someone off, he calls it

SERVICING. When I stand on his feet, I call it

SHADOWING. He naps in the afternoon and wakes with

SHEETLINES on his face, his hair upright, the sound of

SHELLS (SPECIFY)—the sound of mussel shells on the lip of the Bosphorus
crunching beneath his feet. He's given me

SHELTER and

SHIELDING, shown its better to travel away from the

SHOAL. *Let them follow you* he says from somewhere in Los Angeles waiting
for me, If he feels a

SHORT FALL he doesn't tell me about it.

DECEPTION STORY

Friends describe my DISPOSITION

as stoic. *Like a dead fish*, an ex said. DISTANCE

is a funny drug and used to make me a DISTRESSED PERSON,

one who cried in bedrooms and airports. Once I bawled so hard at the border, even the man with the stamps and holster said *Don't cry. You'll be home soon*. My DISTRIBUTION

over the globe debated and set to quota. A nation can only handle so many of me. DITCHING

class, I break into my friend's dad's mansion and swim in the Beverly Hills pool in a borrowed T-shirt. A brief DIVERSION.

My body breaking the chlorinated surface makes it, momentarily, my house, my DIVISION

of driveway gate and alarm codes, my dress-rehearsed DOCTRINE

of pool boys and ping-pong and water delivered on the backs of sequined Sparkletts trucks. *Over here*, DOLLY,

an agent will call out, then pat the hair at your hot black DOME.

After explaining what she will touch, *backs of the hands at the breasts and buttocks*, the hand goes inside my waistband and my heart goes DORMANT.

A dead fish. The last *female assist* I decided to hit on. My life in the American Dream is a DOWNGRADE,

a mere DRAFT

of home. Correction: it satisfies as DRAG.

It is, snarling, what I carve of it alone.

Special Events for Homeland Security

Leave your DOLLY at home—this is no INNOCENT PASSAGE. Ladies, bring your KILL BOX. Boys, your HUNG WEAPON. You will push WARHEAD MATING to the THRESHOLD of ACCEPTABILITY. Whether you're PASSIVE or on the HUNTER TRACK, there's a room for you. An exclusive MAN SPACE with over two-dozen HEIGHT HOLES and bitches in READY POSITION. Eat until you damn near CANNIBALIZE. There's nothing you CANNOT OBSERVE. We ask you follow our TWO-PERSON rule in restricted areas. Otherwise, get your SIMULTANEOUS ENGAGEMENT on. Please come with a safe PASSWORD and a NICKNAME, we'll provide PENETRATION AIDS and RESTRAINTS. Guaranteed to make your SPREADER BAR SWELL.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. In these poems, Sharif reimagines and redefines terms from the Defense dictionary (the original terms appear in small caps). Return to these moments, identifying Sharif's altered definitions. How does this rhetorical decision relate to power? Is Sharif reclaiming these terms? For what kinds of people, and from whom? Why do you think Sharif made the stylistic decision to maintain these terms in all caps? How does this choice affect you as a reader?
2. In the middle of this excerpt, Sharif divides poems with a quote from Muriel Rukeyser and a pair of two-line poems. Return to this section. Why do you think Sharif includes such brief poems? Why might she have chosen to place them where she has? What purpose do they serve? And how does this interrupting voice, this quotation from an outside source, function alongside Sharif's own writing?
3. Consider the narration of Sharif's poetry, the ways she moves fluidly between first and second person. How does Sharif use these shifts to aid her arguments? Do you see one type of narration as functioning more effectively than another? If so, why? Might these types of narration work together? How do these changes impact you as a reader?
4. Take another look at these poems. Who is Sharif's audience, or for whom is she writing? How can you tell what her audience(s) might be? Do you think her poems will reach this population? Why or why not? In what ways to you think you fit, or do not fit, into Sharif's imagined audience? Why?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. We don't always think about poetry as making arguments, but, as an experiment, think about the ways that Sharif's work in this excerpt from *Look* might be said to make an argument. Identify four or five passages or lines from Sharif's work that seem significant to you in terms of what you think Sharif's central argument might be.

Write an essay in which you consider the question: what is Sharif's central argument in these poems? Imagine a reader who is not familiar with Sharif or her work; describe the ways her poems function as arguments. How can a reader tell what the most essential point of her argument is? What does it mean to make arguments through poetry? How might that differ from making an argument through more direct or more conventional form? Finally, consider the impact of Sharif's argument on you as a reader. Is she convincing to you? What does she seem to want you to think about, question, or consider more carefully? And why might she want you to do that? And what might you gain from doing so?

2. Sharif mentions a variety of terms, events, time periods, and national news headlines. For example, she refers to "the trigger pulled in Las Vegas and the Hellfire missile landing in Mazar-e-Sharif" (p. 565). Reread this excerpt from *Look*. Circle and make note of any specific references that you do not recognize or where you aren't quite sure exactly what she is referring to. Keep a list of these. Once you're finished rereading, start on a quest to contextualize and find out details about the events, phrases, or terms you've written down, looking in the library and/or online. Take extensive notes on each item you look up.

Write an essay in which you consider what this new information does for your reading experience of the poems. How does this new information help you understanding Sharif's project as a poet and cultural critic? In what ways has your interpretation or reading of the piece changed? Finally, consider the practice of reading more broadly. How does contextual or historical knowledge affect one's reading practices and experiences? What does it mean to come into contact with a text that makes many references you don't understand? How does one read in the face of that experience? And what are your own readerly practices in this regard? Why does it matter how we approach this difficulty as readers?

3. As we mention in the headnote above, Sharif pulls terms from the Defense dictionary, and these terms consist largely of military rhetoric. In this sense, we might read her work as having something to do with the idea of definition — how words are defined, in what contexts they are used, and how they reveal something about the very context they are used in.

Imagine you are explaining, to a person who has never read this work, the ways that Sharif is working with definition in her poetry. How would you describe this work? Write an essay in which you summarize Sharif's work with definition. You may want to begin by finding out for yourself what the

Defense dictionary is and how it is used so that you can then move on to highlighting the ways that Sharif pushes on and redefines the terms she uses. What is Sharif's purpose in redefining these terms? And how does her work with definition fit into what you believe is the larger project of her poetry in this excerpt?

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. As we suggest in the first "Assignments for Writing," Sharif's poetry calls our attention to a particular kind of language used in the Defense dictionary. One could say that Sharif's poems are *about* language itself — both how we use it and how it shapes and reflects our understanding of the world. One might also argue that this particular focus on language is something common to many poets. For example, Claudia Rankine (p. 499) and Layli Long Solider (p. 425), other poets included in this anthology, also ask us to think carefully about language. Reread Sharif's, Long Soldier's, and Rankine's writing, looking particularly for moments you would characterize as focused on language (how we and others use it, and how it shapes/reflects our understandings).

Write an essay in which you consider these poets' attention to and focus on language. You might revisit Long Soldier's assertion that "Everything is in the language we use" (p. 429) and connect that claim to work you see Rankine doing in chronicling some of her interactions, particularly with white people. How does an understanding of or a focus on particular language help us understand the history of racism in the United States? Why is it important which words we use to talk about which things? What do you suppose each writer hopes we will see about how language plays (and continues to play) a role in oppression and violence? Cite specific passages from Rankine, Sharif, and Long Soldier to illuminate how each writer positions language (what is said, how it is said, what it means) as crucial to understanding history, writing, and the world.

2. Both Solmaz Sharif's poetry and Susan Griffin's work in "Our Secret" (p. 351) comment on and raise questions about the role of war, violence, and conflict in shaping the lives of individual people. While these writers are working on very different historical periods and political contexts, they might be said to have overlapping or interconnected concerns about violence, about identity, and about the very humanity at stake in each of their inquiries.

Write an essay in which you read these two texts alongside one another. What does each have to offer the other? In what ways do you see their projects as connected or taking on similar questions? Cite specific passages that illustrate these connections. And finally, what do these connections tell you about the world more broadly — about war, about violence, about military operations, or about the individual humanity of the people involved?

3. In our "Introduction," we write the following:

But there is another kind of difficulty teachers and students alike will face in encountering the readings we've curated here. This difficulty stems from coming into contact with perspectives and descriptions of the world that you find difficult to hear. Perhaps because your own identity and perspective is either very distant or very close to the ones taken up in a given reading. Or perhaps because it is often difficult to acknowledge and take account of what is urgently and gravely wrong in our current cultural and political moment. The essays here challenge us to *be* writers — which means, in a fundamental sense, to be willing to look carefully, closely, and unrelentingly both at the world as you imagine it to be and at the world as it is for those who are *not* you. In this spirit, we invite you to develop and nurture new ways of reading for yourself, new ways of listening when someone else (for example, an author of one of the essays in this book) is speaking. We believe this will not only make you a better reader and writer, but that it will also make you a more attentive and precise thinker in your life at large — both your academic life *and* your personal/social/professional life as you move through and leave your college experience. (p. 2)

In this assignment, we invite you to consider again this idea of "the world as you imagine it to be and the world as it is for those who are *not* you." You might begin by describing what you think we mean in the above passage and how that might connect to your own reading of Sharif. Where do you see yourself or your world in Sharif's poems? What experiences do you bring to your reading of the text; in other words, how does your own identity and experience shape the way you understand Sharif's work? Along these lines, we'd like you to consider other texts in this collection that might be "difficult" for you to read. These can be texts you have already explored through your writing course, but they can also be texts that are new to you. Read through the introductions and first pages of essays that stand out to you to discover one or two other pieces of writing that seem "difficult." Write an essay in which you consider your experience with Sharif's work and connect that experience to another essay in the collection: What does it mean for a text to be difficult? How can you tell it will be (or is) difficult for you? How does the writer anticipate (or not) your difficulty? And what strategies as a reader can you use to intellectually and emotionally cope with this kind of difficulty?

ANNA Tsing

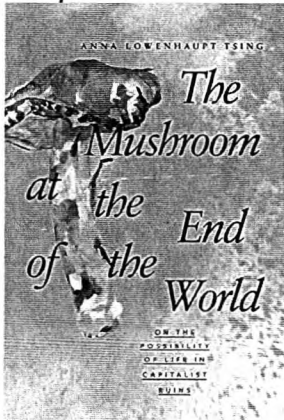


Anna Tsing

A professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a Niels Bohr Professor at Aarhus University in Denmark, Anna Tsing (b. 1952) enjoys blurring and traversing academic boundaries. She has published extensively across academic boundaries, writing *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-way Place* (1993) and *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2004), and coediting *Communities and Conservation* (2005) and *Words in Motion* (2009), among other titles. Throughout her work, Tsing urges us “to revitalize the conversation between the human and natural sciences. One way to do this is through developing common tools of observation.”

This keen eye for observation is evident in Tsing’s research and writing, particularly in the following excerpt from *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), in which Tsing explores the relationships between contamination, collaboration, and life. She writes, “staying alive — for every species — requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die.” Through an investigation of one of the world’s most sought-after fungi, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* presents a unique inquiry into the relationship between capitalist destruction and collaborative survival within multispecies landscapes. Tsing’s work may be characterized as belonging to a new area of research and writing that cuts across traditional academic disciplines to study the current period of the Earth’s history when human activity has become the dominant influence on the environment — an era often called the “Anthropocene.” It might even be useful for you to spend some time reading about this term online before you read Tsing’s work.

Tsing calls for us, each of us, to care about, and for, our environment. While she notes the important role played by academic research and publications in environmental advocacy, she makes clear that this is not a demand placed solely upon students and scholars of the natural sciences. “Scholars still have a lot to learn about noticing, but for this, we need the resources of all the disciplines. If we want to address the massive environmental challenges of our times, we must do a better job of noticing who lives with us on human-disturbed landscapes, and under what conditions.”



In the selection that follows, Tsing observes the Matsutake mushroom — exorbitantly priced and greatly revered in Japan — which grows in areas significantly altered by human impact. She traces the journey of this fungus, connecting its uprooting from the natural world to capitalism and consumption. Tsing urges us to understand our interconnectedness with each other and the land through nonhuman, living organisms. Using this daring rhetorical strategy, she cultivates a narrative for this mushroom that runs so much deeper than purely scientific or environmental calls to action — the mushroom enters and affects our landscapes, economies, kitchens, and bodies.

Tsing reflects, "Colleagues always ask each other, 'How can you tell when your writing is right?' For me it is rhythms; I can hear the song. Of course, there are many possible songs. . . . But scholars find it easier to find the point than the music, yet we need the music to make the point." Tsing's writing moves us — through chronicling the life of a mushroom, through countries, cultures, and habitats, through the collective emotions living beings share. Pay close attention to the points she makes, but do not forget to listen for the song.

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The Mushroom at the End of the World

CONTAMINATION AS COLLABORATION

I wanted someone to tell me things were going to be fine, but no one did.

— MAI NENG MOUA, "ALONG THE WAY TO THE MEKONG"

How does a gathering become a "happening," that is, greater than a sum of its parts? One answer is contamination. We are contaminated by our encounters; they change who we are as we make way for others. As contamination changes world-making projects, mutual worlds — and new directions — may emerge.¹ Everyone carries a history of contamination; purity is not an option. One value of keeping precarity in mind is that it makes us remember that changing with circumstances is the stuff of survival.

But what is survival? In popular American fantasies, survival is all about saving oneself by fighting off others. The "survival" featured in U.S. television shows or alien-planet stories is a synonym for conquest and expansion. I will not use the term that way. Please open yourself to another usage. This book argues that staying alive — for every species — requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die.

**COLLABORATION MEANS WORKING
ACROSS DIFFERENCE, WHICH LEADS
TO CONTAMINATION.**

Popular fantasies are hardly the whole problem: one-against-all survival has also engaged scholars. Scholars have imagined survival as the advancement of individual interests — whether "individuals" are species, populations, organisms, or genes — human or otherwise. Consider the twin master sciences of the twentieth century, neoclassical economics and population genetics. Each of these disciplines came to power in the early twentieth century with formulations bold enough to redefine modern knowledge. Population genetics stimulated the "modern synthesis" in biology, uniting evolutionary theory and genetics. Neoclassical economics reshaped economic policy, creating the modern economy of its imagination. While practitioners of each have had little to do with each other, the twins set up similar frames. At the heart of each is the self-contained individual actor, out to maximize personal interests,

whether for reproduction or wealth. Richard Dawkins's "selfish gene" gets across the idea, useful at many life scales: It is the ability of genes (or organisms, or populations) to look out for their own interests that fuels evolution.² Similarly, the life of *Homo economicus*, economic man, is a series of choices to follow his best interests.

The assumption of self-containment made an explosion of new knowledge possible. Thinking through self-containment and thus the self-interest of individuals (at whatever scale) made it possible to ignore contamination, that is, transformation through encounter. Self-contained individuals are not transformed by encounter. Maximizing their interests, they use encounters — but remain unchanged in them. *Noticing* is unnecessary to track these unchanging individuals. A "standard" individual can stand in for all as a unit of analysis. It becomes possible to organize knowledge through logic alone. Without the possibility of transformative encounters, mathematics can replace natural history and ethnography. It was the productiveness of this simplification that made the twins so powerful, and the obvious falsity of the original premise was increasingly forgotten.³ Economy and ecology thus each became sites for algorithms of progress-as-expansion.

The problem of precarious survival helps us see what is wrong. Precarity is a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others. In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent. When I sprain my ankle, a stout stick may help me walk, and I enlist its assistance. I am now an encounter in motion, a woman-and-stick. It is hard for me to think of any challenge I might face without soliciting the assistance of others, human and not human. It is unselfconscious privilege that allows us to fantasize — counter-factually — that we each survive alone.

If survival always involves others, it is also necessarily subject to the indeterminacy of self-and-other transformations. We change through our collaborations both within and across species. The important stuff for life on earth happens in those transformations, not in the decision trees of self-contained individuals. Rather than seeing only the expansion-and-conquest strategies of relentless individuals, we must look for histories that develop through contamination. Thus, how might a gathering become a "happening"?

Collaboration is work across difference, yet this is not the innocent diversity of self-contained evolutionary tracks. The evolution of our "selves" is already polluted by histories of encounter; we are mixed up with others before we even begin any new collaboration. Worse yet, we are mixed up in the projects that do us the most harm. The diversity that allows us to enter collaborations emerges from histories of extermination, imperialism, and all the rest. Contamination makes diversity.

This changes the work we imagine for names, including ethnicities and species. If categories are unstable, we must watch them emerge within encounters. To use category names should be a commitment to tracing the assemblages in which these categories gain a momentary

hold.⁴ Only from here can I return to meeting Mien and matsutake in a Cascades forest. What does it mean to be “Mien” or to be “forest”? These identities entered our meeting from histories of transformative ruin, even as new collaborations changed them.

Oregon’s national forests are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, which aims to conserve forests as a national resource. Yet the conservation status of the landscape has been hopelessly confused by a hundred-year history of logging and fire suppression. Contamination creates forests, transforming them in the process. Because of this, noticing as well as counting is required to know the landscape.

Oregon’s forests played a key role in the U.S. Forest Service’s early-twentieth-century formation, during which foresters worked to find kinds of conservation that timber barons would support.⁵ Fire suppression was the biggest result: Loggers and foresters could agree on it. Meanwhile, loggers were eager to take out the ponderosa pines that so impressed white pioneers in the eastern Cascades. The great ponderosa stands were logged out by the 1980s. It turned out that they could not reproduce without the periodic fires the Forest Service had stopped. But firs and spindly lodgepole pines were flourishing with fire exclusion — at least if flourishing means spreading in ever denser and more flammable thickets of live, dead, and dying trees.⁶ For several decades, Forest Service management has meant, on the one hand, trying to make the ponderosas come back, and, on the other, trying to thin, cut, or otherwise control flammable fir and lodgepole thickets. Ponderosa, fir, and lodgepole, each finding life through human disturbance, are now creatures of contaminated diversity.

Surprisingly, in this ruined industrial landscape, new value emerged: matsutake. Matsutake fruit especially well under mature lodgepole, and mature lodgepole exists in prodigious numbers in the eastern Cascades because of fire exclusion. With the logging of ponderosa pines and fire exclusion, lodgepoles have spread, and despite their flammability, fire exclusion allows them a long maturity. Oregon matsutake fruit only after forty to fifty years of lodgepole growth, made possible by excluding fire.⁷ The abundance of matsutake is a recent historical creation: contaminated diversity.

And what are Southeast Asian hill people doing in Oregon? Once I realized that almost everyone in the forest was there for explicitly “ethnic” reasons, finding out what these ethnicities implied became urgent. I needed to know what created communal agendas that included mushroom hunting; thus I followed the ethnicities they named for me. The pickers, like the forests, must be appreciated in becoming, not just counted. Yet almost all U.S. scholarship on Southeast Asian refugees ignores ethnic formation in Southeast Asia. To counteract this omission, allow me an extended story. Despite their specificity, Mien stand in here for all the pickers — and the rest of us too. Transformation through collaboration, ugly and otherwise, is the human condition.

The distant ancestors of Kao’s Mien community are imagined as emerging already in contradiction and on the run. Moving through the

hills of southern China to hide from imperial power, they also treasured imperial documents exempting them from taxation and *corvée*. A little more than a hundred years ago, some moved farther out of the way — into the northern hills of what are now Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. They brought a distinctive script, based on Chinese characters and used for writing to spirits.⁸ As both refusal and acceptance of Chinese authority, the script is a neat expression of contaminated diversity: Mien are Chinese, and not Chinese. Later they would learn to be Lao/Thai, but not Lao/Thai, and then American, and not American.

Mien are not known for their respect for national boundaries; communities have repeatedly crossed back and forth, especially when armies threaten. (Kao's uncle learned Chinese and Lao from cross-border movement.) Yet, despite this mobility, Mien are hardly an autonomous tribe, free from the control of the state. Hjørleifur Jonsson has shown how Mien lifeways have repeatedly changed in relation to state agendas. In the first half of the twentieth century, for example, Mien in Thailand organized their communities around the opium trade. Only large, polygynous households controlled by powerful senior men could keep hold of the opium contracts. Some households had one hundred members. The Thai state did not mandate this family organization; it arose from the Mien encounter with opium. In a similarly unplanned process in the late twentieth century, Mien in Thailand came to identify as an "ethnic group" with distinctive customs; Thai policy toward minorities made this identity possible. Meanwhile, along the Laos/Thailand border, Mien slipped back and forth, evading state policy on both sides even while being shaped by it.⁹

Those cross-boundary Asian hills have known many peoples, and Mien sensibilities have developed in engagement with these shifting groups as all have negotiated imperial governance and rebellion, licit and illicit trade, and millennial mobilization. To understand how Mien came to be matsutake pickers requires considering their relationship with another group now in the Oregon forests, Hmong. Hmong are like Mien in many ways. They also ran south from China; they also crossed borders and occupied the high altitudes suited to commercial opium farming; they also value their distinctive dialects and traditions. A mid-twentieth-century millennial movement started by an illiterate farmer produced a completely original Hmong script. This was the time of the U.S.-Indochina War, and Hmong were in the thick of it. As linguist William Smalley point out, discarded military ordnance in the area would have exposed this inspired farmer to English, Russian, and Chinese writing, and he might also have seen Lao and Thai.¹⁰ Emerging from the trash of war, this distinctive and multiply derivative Hmong script, like that of the Mien, is a wonderful icon for contaminated diversity.

Hmong are proud of their patrilineal clan organization, and, according to ethnographer William Geddes, clans have been key to forming long-distance ties among men.¹¹ Clan relations allowed military leaders to recruit outside their face-to-face networks. This proved relevant when the United States took over imperial oversight after the French defeat by

Vietnamese nationalists in 1954, thus inheriting the loyalty of French-trained Hmong soldiers. One of those soldiers became General Vang Pao, who mobilized Hmong in Laos to fight in behalf of the United States, becoming what 1970s CIA director William Colby called "the biggest hero of the Vietnam War."¹² Vang Pao recruited not just individuals but villages and clans into the war. Although his claims to represent Hmong disguised the fact that Hmong also fought for the communist Pathet Lao, Vang Pao made his cause simultaneously a Hmong cause and a U.S. anticommunist cause. Through his control over opium transport, bombing targets, and CIA rice drops, as well as his charisma, Vang Pao generated enormous ethnic loyalty, consolidating one kind of "Hmong."¹³ It is hard to think of a better example of contaminated diversity.

Some Mien fought in Vang Pao's army. Some followed Hmong to the Ban Vinai refugee camp Vang Pao helped to have established in Thailand after he fled Laos following the U.S. withdrawal in 1975. But the war did not give Mien the sense of ethnic-political unity it gave Hmong. Some Mien fought for other political leaders, including Chao La, a Mien general. Some left Laos for Thailand long before the communist victory in Laos. Jonsson's oral histories of Mien in the United States suggest that what are often imagined as innocent "regional" groupings of Laotian Mien — northern Mien, southern Mien — refer to divergent histories of forced resettlement by Vang Pao and Chao La, respectively.¹⁴ War, he argues, creates ethnic identities.¹⁵ War forces people to move but also cements ties to reimagined ancestral cultures. Hmong helped to stimulate the mix, and Mien came to participate.

In the 1980s, Mien who had crossed from Laos to Thailand joined U.S. programs to bring anticommunists from Southeast Asia to the United States and allow them, through refugee status, to become citizens. The refugees arrived in the United States just as welfare was being cut; they were offered few resources for livelihood or assimilation. Most of those from Laos and Cambodia had neither money nor Western education; they moved into off-the-grid jobs such as matsutake picking. In the Oregon woods, they use skills honed in Indochinese wars. Those experienced in jungle fighting rarely get lost, since they know how to find their way in unfamiliar forests. Yet the forest has not stimulated a generic Indochinese — or American — identity. Mimicking the structure of Thai refugee camps, Mien, Hmong, Lao, and Khmer keep their places separate. Yet white Oregonians sometimes call them all "Cambodians," or, with even more confusion, "Hong Kongs." Negotiating multiple forms of prejudice and dispossession, contaminated diversity proliferates.

I hope that at this point you are saying, "This is hardly news! I can think of plenty of similar examples from the landscape and people around me." I agree; contaminated diversity is everywhere. If such stories are so widespread and so well known, the question becomes: Why don't we use these stories in how we know the world? One reason is that contaminated diversity is complicated, often ugly, and humbling. Contaminated diversity implicates survivors in histories of greed, violence, and environmental

destruction. The tangled landscape grown up from corporate logging reminds us of the irreplaceable graceful giants that came before. The survivors of war remind us of the bodies they climbed over — or shot — to get to us. We don't know whether to love or hate these survivors. Simple moral judgments don't come to hand.

Worse yet, contaminated diversity is recalcitrant to the kind of "summing up" that has become the hallmark of modern knowledge. Contaminated diversity is not only particular and historical, ever changing, but also relational. It has no self-contained units; its units are encounter-based collaborations. Without self-contained units, it is impossible to compute costs and benefits, or functionality, to any "one" involved. No self-contained individuals or groups assure their self-interests oblivious to the encounter. Without algorithms based on self-containment, scholars and policymakers might have to learn something about

**IT IS IN LISTENING TO THAT
CACOPHONY OF TROUBLED STORIES
THAT WE MIGHT ENCOUNTER OUR BEST
HOPES FOR PRECARIOUS SURVIVAL.**

the cultural and natural histories at stake. That takes time, and too much time, perhaps, for those who dream of grasping the whole in an equation. But who put them in charge? If a rush of troubled stories is the best way to tell about contaminated diversity, then it's time to make that rush

part of our knowledge practices. Perhaps, like the war survivors themselves, we need to tell and tell until all our stories of death and near-death and gratuitous life are standing with us to face the challenges of the present. It is in listening to that cacophony of troubled stories that we might encounter our best hopes for precarious survival.

This book tells a few such stories, which take me not only to the Cascades but also to Tokyo auctions, Finnish Lapland, and a scientist's lunchroom, where I am so excited I spill my tea. Following all these stories at once is as challenging — or, once one gets the hang of it, as simple — as singing a madrigal in which each singer's melody courses in and out of the others. Such interwoven rhythms perform a still lively temporal alternative to the unified progress-time we still long to obey.

NOTES

Epigraph: Mai Neng Moua, "Along the way to the Mekong," in *Bamboo among the oaks: Contemporary writing by Hmong Americans*, ed. Mai Neng Moua, 57–61 (St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books, 2002), on 60.

¹ Multicellular life was made possible by multiple, mutual contaminations of bacteria. Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What is life?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

² Richard Dawkins, *The selfish gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

³ Many critics have refused the "selfishness" of these assumptions and inserted altruism into these equations. The problem, however, is not selfishness but self-containment.

⁴ A species name is a useful heuristic with which to introduce an organism, but the name does not capture either the particularity of that organism or its position within sometimes-rapid collective transformations. An ethnic name has the same problem. But doing without these names is worse: we are left imagining that all trees, or Asians, look alike. I need names to give substance to noticing, but I need them as names-in-motion.

⁵ Harold Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A history* (1976; Seattle: University of Washington Press, centennial ed., 2004); William Robbins, *American forestry* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

⁶ For the related ecologies of Oregon's Blue Mountains, see Nancy Langston, *Forest dreams, forest nightmares* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996). For a fuller discussion of eastern Cascades ecology, see Chapter 14.

⁷ Interview, forester Phil Cruz, October 2004.

⁸ Jeffery MacDonald, *Transnational aspects of lu-Mien refugee identity* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁹ Hjørleifur Jonsson, *Mien relations: Mountain people and state control in Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ William Smalley, Chia Koua Vang, and Gnua Yee Vang, *Mother of writing: The origin and development of a Hmong messianic script* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹¹ William Geddes, *Migrants of the mountains: The cultural ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Nyua) of Thailand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹² Quoted by Douglas Martin, "Gen. Vang Pao, Laotian who aided U.S., dies at 81," *New York Times*, January 8, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/world/asia/08vangpao.html>.

¹³ Sources for this history include Alfred McCoy, *The politics of heroin: CIA complicity in the global drug trade* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2003); Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the secret war in Laos, 1942-1992* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); Gary Yia Lee, ed., *The impact of globalization and transnationalism on the Hmong* (St. Paul, MN: Center for Hmong Studies, 2006).

¹⁴ Personal communication, 2007.

¹⁵ Hjørleifur Jonsson, "War's ontogeny: Militias and ethnic boundaries in Laos and exile," *Southeast Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2009): 125-149.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH SCALE

No, no, you are not thinking; you are just being logical.

— PHYSICIST NIELS BOHR DEFENDING "SPOOKY ACTION AT A DISTANCE"

To listen to and tell a rush of stories is a method. And why not make the strong claim and call it a science, an addition to knowledge? Its research object is contaminated diversity; its unit of analysis is the indeterminate encounter. To learn anything we must revitalize arts of noticing and include ethnography and natural history. But we have a problem with scale. A rush of stories cannot be neatly summed up. Its scales do not nest neatly; they draw attention to interrupting geographies and tempos. These interruptions elicit more stories. This is the rush of stories' power as a science. Yet it is just these interruptions that step out of the bounds of most modern science, which demands the possibility for infinite expansion without changing the research framework. Arts of noticing are considered archaic because they are unable to "scale up" in this way. The ability to make one's research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research questions, has become a hallmark of modern knowledge. To have any hope of thinking with mushrooms, we must get outside this expectation. In this spirit, I lead a foray into mushroom forests as "anti-plantations."

The expectation of scaling up is not limited to science. Progress itself has often been defined by its ability to make projects expand without

changing their framing assumptions. This quality is “scalability.” The term is a bit confusing, because it could be interpreted to mean “able to be discussed in terms of scale.” Both scalable and nonscalable projects, however, can be discussed in relation to scale. When Fernand Braudel explained history’s “long durée” or Niels Bohr showed us the quantum atom, these were not projects of scalability, although they each revolutionized thinking about scale. Scalability, in contrast, is the ability of a project to change scales smoothly without any change in project frames. A scalable business, for example, does not change its organization as it expands. This is possible only if business relations are not transformative, changing the business as new relations are added. Similarly, a scalable research project admits only data that already fit the research frame. Scalability requires that project elements be oblivious to the indeterminacies of encounter; that’s how they allow smooth expansion. Thus, too, scalability banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might change things.

Scalability is not an ordinary feature of nature. Making projects scalable takes a lot of work. Even after that work, there will still be interactions between scalable and nonscalable project elements. Yet, despite the contributions of thinkers such as Braudel and Bohr, the connection between scaling up and the advancement of humanity has been so strong that scalable elements receive the lion’s share of attention. The nonscalable becomes an impediment. It is time to turn attention to the nonscalable, not only as objects for description but also as incitements to theory.

A theory of nonscalability might begin in the work it takes to create scalability — and the messes it makes. One vantage point might be that early and influential icon for this work: the European colonial plantation. In their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sugarcane plantations in Brazil, for example, Portuguese planters stumbled on a formula for smooth expansion. They crafted self-contained, interchangeable project elements, as follows: exterminate local people and plants; prepare now-empty, unclaimed land; and bring in exotic and isolated labor and crops for production. This landscape model of scalability became an inspiration for later industrialization and modernization. The sharp contrast between this model and the matsutake forests that form the subject of this book is a useful platform from which to build a critical distance from scalability.¹

Consider the elements of the Portuguese sugarcane plantation in colonial Brazil. First, the cane, as Portuguese knew it: Sugarcane was planted by sticking a cane in the ground and waiting for it to sprout. All the plants were clones, and Europeans had no knowledge of how to breed this New Guinea cultigen. The interchangeability of planting stock, undisturbed by reproduction, was a characteristic of European cane. Carried to the New World, it had few interspecies relations. As plants go, it was comparatively self-contained, oblivious to encounter.

Second, cane labor: Portuguese cane-growing came together with their newly gained power to extract enslaved people from Africa. As cane workers in the New World, enslaved Africans had great advantages from growers’ perspectives: they had no local social relations and thus

no established routes for escape. Like the cane itself, which had no history of either companion species or disease relations in the New World, they were isolated. They were on their way to becoming self-contained, and thus standardizable as abstract labor. Plantations were organized to further alienation for better control. Once central milling operations were started, all operations had to run on the time frame of the mill. Workers had to cut cane as fast as they could, and with full attention, just to avoid injury. Under these conditions, workers did, indeed, become self-contained and interchangeable units. Already considered commodities, they were given jobs made interchangeable by the regularity and coordinated timing engineered into the cane.

Interchangeability in relation to the project frame, for both human work and plant commodities, emerged in these historical experiments. It was a success: Great profits were made in Europe, and most Europeans were too far away to see the effects. The project was, for the first time, scalable — or, more accurately, seemingly scalable.² Sugarcane plantations expanded and spread across the warm regions of the world. Their contingent components — cloned planting stock, coerced labor, conquered and thus open land — showed how alienation, interchangeability, and expansion could lead to unprecedented profits. This formula shaped the dreams we have come to call progress and modernity. As Sidney Mintz has argued, sugarcane plantations were the model for factories during industrialization; factories built plantation-style alienation into their plans.³ The success of expansion through scalability shaped capitalist modernization. By envisioning more and more of the world through the lens of the plantation, investors devised all kinds of new commodities. Eventually, they posited that everything on earth — and beyond — might be scalable, and thus exchangeable at market values. This was utilitarianism, which eventually congealed as modern economics and contributed to forging more scalability — or at least its appearance.

Contrast the matsutake forest: unlike sugarcane clones, matsutake make it evident that they cannot live without transformative relations with other species. Matsutake mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of an underground fungus associated with certain forest trees. The fungus gets its carbohydrates from mutualistic relations with the roots of its host trees, for whom it also forages. Matsutake make it possible for host trees to live in poor soils, without fertile humus. In turn, they are nourished by the trees. This transformative mutualism has made it impossible for humans to cultivate matsutake. Japanese research institutions have thrown millions of yen into making matsutake cultivation possible, but so far without success. Matsutake resist the conditions of the plantation. They require the dynamic multispecies diversity of the forest — with its contaminating relationality.⁴

Furthermore, matsutake foragers are far from the disciplined, interchangeable laborers of the cane fields. Without disciplined alienation, no scalable corporations form in the forest. In the U.S. Pacific Northwest, foragers flock to the forest following “mushroom fever.” They are independent, finding their way without formal employment.

Yet it would be a mistake to see matsutake commerce as a primitive survival; this is the misapprehension of progress blinders. Matsutake commerce does not occur in some imagined time before scalability. It is dependent on scalability — in ruins. Many pickers in Oregon are displaced from industrial economies, and the forest itself is the remains of scalability work. Both matsutake commerce and ecology depend on interactions between scalability and its undoing.

The U.S. Pacific Northwest was the crucible of U.S. timber policy and practice in the twentieth century. This region attracted the timber industry after it had already destroyed midwestern forests — and just as scientific forestry became a power in U.S. national governance. Private and public (and, later, environmentalist) interests battled it out in the Pacific Northwest; the scientific-industrial forestry on which they tenuously agreed was a creature of many compromises. Still, here is a place to see forests treated as much like scalable plantations as they might ever be. During the heyday of joint public-private industrial forestry in the 1960s and 1970s, this meant monocrop even-aged timber stands.⁵ Such management took a huge amount of work. Unwanted tree species, and indeed all other species, were sprayed with poison. Fires were absolutely excluded. Alienated work crews planted “superior” trees. Thinning was brutal, regular, and essential. Proper spacing allowed maximum rates of growth as well as mechanical harvesting. Timber trees were a new kind of sugarcane: managed for uniform growth, without multispecies interference, and thinned and harvested by machines and anonymous workers.

Despite its technological prowess, the project of turning forests into plantations worked out unevenly at best. Earlier, timber companies had made a killing by just harvesting the most expensive trees; when national forests were opened for logging after World War II, they continued “high grading,” a practice dignified under standards that said mature trees were better replaced by fast-growing youngsters. Clear-cutting, or “even-aged management,” was introduced to move beyond the inefficiencies of such pick-and-choose harvesting. But the regrowing trees of scientific-industrial management were not so inviting, profit-wise. Where the great timber species had earlier been maintained by Native American burning, it was difficult to reproduce the “right” species. Firs and lodgepole pines grew up where great ponderosas had once held dominance. Then the price of Pacific Northwest timber plummeted. Without easy pickings, timber companies began to search elsewhere for cheaper trees. Without the political clout and funds of big timber, the region’s Forest Service districts lost funding, and maintaining plantation-like forests became cost-prohibitive. Environmentalists started going to the courts, asking for stricter conservation protections. They were blamed for the crashing timber economy, but the timber companies — and most of the big trees — had already left.⁶

By the time I wandered into the eastern Cascades, in 2004, fir and lodgepole had made great advances across what once had been almost pure stands of ponderosa pine. Although signs along the highways still said “Industrial Timber,” it was hard to imagine industry. The landscape

was covered with thickets of lodgepole and fir: too small for most timber users; not scenic enough for recreation. But something else had emerged in the regional economy — matsutake. Forest Service researchers in the 1990s found that the annual commercial value of the mushrooms was as least as much as the value of the timber.⁷ Matsutake had stimulated a nonscalable forest economy in the ruins of scalable industrial forestry.

**MATSUTAKE HAD STIMULATED
A NONSCALABLE FOREST ECONOMY
IN THE RUINS OF SCALABLE
INDUSTRIAL FORESTRY.**

The challenge for thinking with precarity is to understand the ways projects for making scalability have transformed landscape and society, while also seeing where scalability fails — and where nonscalable ecological and economic relations erupt. It is key to take note of the careers of both scalability and nonscalability. But it would be a huge mistake to assume that scalability is bad and nonscalability is good. Nonscalable projects can be as terrible in their effects as scalable ones. Unregulated loggers destroy forests more rapidly than scientific foresters. The main distinguishing feature between scalable and nonscalable projects is not ethical conduct but rather that the latter are more diverse because they are not geared up for expansion. Nonscalable projects can be terrible or benign; they run the range.

New eruptions of nonscalability do not mean that scalability has disappeared. In an era of neoliberal restructuring, scalability is increasingly reduced to a technical problem rather than a popular mobilization in which citizens, governments, and corporations should work together. As chapter 4 explores, the articulation between scalable accounting and nonscalable workplace relations is increasingly accepted as a model for capitalist accumulation. Production does not have to be scalable as long as elites are able to regularize their account books. Can we keep sight of the continuing hegemony of scalability projects while immersing ourselves in the forms and tactics of precarity?

Part 2 of this book traces the interplay between scalable and nonscalable in forms of capitalism in which scalable accounting allows nonscalable labor and natural resource management. In this “salvage” capitalism, supply chains organize the translation process in which wildly diverse forms of work and nature are made commensurate — for capital. Part 3 returns to matsutake forests as anti-plantations in which transformative encounters create the possibilities of life. The contaminated diversity of ecological relations takes center stage.

But first, a foray into indeterminacy: the central feature of the assemblages I follow. So far, I’ve defined assemblages in relation to their negative features: their elements are contaminated and thus unstable; they refuse to scale up smoothly. Yet assemblages are defined by the strength of what they gather as much as their always-possible dissipation. They make history. This combination of ineffability and presence is evident in smell: another gift of the mushroom.

NOTES

Epigraph: Niels Bohr quoted in Otto Robert Frisch, *What little I remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 95.

¹ A rich interdisciplinary literature — comprising anthropology, geography, art history, and historical agronomy, among other fields — has gathered around the sugarcane plantation. See especially Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and power: The place of sugar in modern history* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1986); and Mintz, *Worker in the cane* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960); J. H. Galloway, *The sugar cane industry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jill Casid, *Sowing empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Jonathan Sauer, *A historical geography of crop plants* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 1993).

² Sugarcane plantations were never as fully scalable as planters wished. Enslaved labor escaped into maroon communities. Imported fungal rots spread with the cane. Scalability is never stable; at best, it takes a huge amount of work.

³ Mintz, *Sweetness and power*, 47.

⁴ For introductions to matsutake biology and ecology, see Ogawa Makoto, *Matsutake no Seibutsugaku [Matsutake biology]* (1978; Tokyo: Tsukiji Shokan, 1991); David Hosford, David Pilz, Randy Molina, and Michael Amaranthus, *Ecology and management of the commercially harvested American matsutake mushroom* (USDA Forest Service General Technical Report PNW-412, 1997).

⁵ Key references include Paul Hirt, *A conspiracy of optimism: Management of the national forests since World War Two* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); William Robbins, *Landscapes of conflict: The Oregon story, 1940–2000* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Richard Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific rainforest: Production, science, and regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

⁶ For what went wrong, see Langston, *Forest dreams* (cited in chap. 2, n. 6). For the eastern Cascades, see Mike Znerold, “A new integrated forest resource plan for ponderosa pine forests on the Deschutes National Forest,” paper presented at the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources workshop, “Tools for Site Specific Silviculture in Northwestern Ontario,” Thunder Bay, Ontario, April 18–20, 1989.

⁷ Susan Alexander, David Pilz, Nancy Weber, Ed Brown, and Victoria Rockwell, “Mushrooms, trees, and money: Value estimates of commercial mushrooms and timber in the Pacific Northwest,” *Environmental Management* 30, no. 1 (2002): 129–141.

INTERLUDE: SMELLING

“What leaf? What mushroom?”

— JOHN CAGE’S TRANSLATION OF A CLASSIC POEM BY BASHO

What is the story of a smell? Not an ethnography of smelling, but the story of the smell itself, wafting into the nostrils of people and animals, and even impressing the roots of plants and the membranes of soil bacteria? Smell draws us into the entangled threads of memory and possibility.

Matsutake guides not just me but many others. Moved by the smell, people and animals across the northern hemisphere brave wild terrain searching for it. Deer select matsutake over other mushroom choices. Bears turn over logs and excavate ditches searching for it. And several Oregon mushroom hunters told me of elk with bloody muzzles from uprooting matsutake from the sharp pumice soil. The smell, they said, draws elk from one patch straight to another. And what is smell but a particular form of chemical sensitivity? In this interpretation, trees too are touched by the smell of matsutake, allowing it into their roots. As with truffles, flying insects have been seen circling underground caches. In contrast, slugs, other fungi, and many kinds of soil bacteria are repulsed by the smell, moving out of its range.

Smell is elusive. Its effects surprise us. We don't know how to put much about smell into words, even when our reactions are strong and certain. Humans breathe and smell in the same intake of air, and describing smell seems almost as difficult as describing air. But smell, unlike air, is a sign of the presence of another, to which we are already responding. Response always takes us somewhere new; we are not quite ourselves any more — or at least the selves we were, but rather ourselves in encounter with another. Encounters are, by their nature, indeterminate; we are unpredictably transformed. Might smell, in its confusing mix of elusiveness and certainty, be a useful guide to the indeterminacy of encounter?

Indeterminacy has a rich legacy in human appreciation of mushrooms. American composer John Cage wrote a set of short performance pieces called *Indeterminacy*, many of which celebrate encounters with mushrooms.¹ Hunting wild mushrooms, for Cage, required a particular kind of attention: attention to the here and now of encounter, in all its contingencies and surprises. Cage's music was all about this "always different" here and now, which he contrasted to the enduring "sameness" of classical composition; he composed to get the audience to listen as much to ambient sounds as composed music. In one famous composition, 4'33", no music is played at all, and the audience is forced to just listen. Cage's attention to listening as things occurred brought him to appreciate indeterminacy. The Cage quotation with which I began this chapter is his translation of seventeenth-century Japanese poet Matsuo Basho's haiku, "matsutake ya shiraranu ki no ha no hebari tsuku," which I have seen translated as "Matsutake; And on it stuck / The leaf of some unknown tree."² Cage decided that the indeterminacy of encounter was not clear enough in such translations. First he settled on "That that's unknown brings mushroom and leaf together," which nicely expresses the indeterminacy of encounter. But, he thought, it is too ponderous. "What leaf? What mushroom?" can also take us into that open-endedness that Cage so valued in learning from mushrooms.³

Indeterminacy has been equally important in what scientists learn from mushrooms. Mycologist Alan Rayner finds the indeterminacy of fungal growth one of the most exciting things about fungi.⁴ Human bodies achieve a determinate form early in our lives. Barring injury, we'll never be all that different in shape than we were as adolescents. We can't grow extra limbs, and we're stuck with the one brain we've each got. In contrast, fungi keep growing and changing form all their lives. Fungi are famous for changing shape in relation to their encounters and environments. Many are "potentially immortal," meaning they die from disease, injury, or lack of resources, but not from old age. Even this little fact can alert us to how much our thoughts about knowledge and existence just assume determinate life form and old age. We rarely imagine life without such limits — and when we do we stray into magic. Rayner challenges us to think with mushrooms, otherwise. Some aspects of our lives are more comparable to fungal indeterminacy, he points out. Our daily habits are repetitive, but they are also open-ended, responding to opportunity and encounter. What if our indeterminate life form was not the shape of our

bodies but rather the shape of our motions over time? Such indeterminacy expands our concept of human life, showing us how we are transformed by encounter. Humans and fungi share such here-and-now transformations through encounter. Sometimes they encounter each other. As another seventeenth-century haiku put it: "Matsutake / Taken by someone else / Right in front of my nose."⁵ What person? What mushroom?

The smell of matsutake transformed me in a physical way. The first time I cooked them, they ruined an otherwise lovely stir-fry. The smell was overwhelming. I couldn't eat it; I couldn't even pick out the other vegetables without encountering the smell. I threw the whole pan away and ate my rice plain. After that I was cautious, collecting but not eating. Finally, one day, I brought the whole load to a Japanese colleague, who was head over heels in delight. She had never seen so much matsutake in her life. Of course she prepared some for dinner. First, she showed me how she tore apart each mushroom, not touching it with a knife. The metal of the knife changes the flavor, she said, and, besides, her mother told her that the spirit of the mushroom doesn't like it. Then she grilled the matsutake on a hot pan without oil. Oil changes the smell, she explained. Worse yet, butter, with its strong smell. Matsutake must be dry grilled or put into a soup; oil or butter ruins it. She served the grilled matsutake with a bit of lime juice. It was marvelous! The smell had begun to delight me.

Over the next few weeks, my senses changed. It was an amazing year for matsutake, and they were everywhere. Now, when I caught a whiff, I felt happy. I lived for several years in Borneo, where I had had a similar experience with durian, that marvelously stinky tropical fruit. The first time I was served durian I thought I would vomit. But it was a good year for durian, and the smell was everywhere. Before long I found myself thrilled by the smell; I couldn't remember what had sickened me. Similarly, matsutake: I could no longer remember what I had found so disturbing. Now it smelled like joy.

I'm not the only one who has that reaction. Koji Ueda runs a beautifully trim vegetable shop in Kyoto's traditional market. During the matsutake season, he explained, most people who come into the store don't want to buy (his matsutake are expensive); they want to smell. Just coming into the store makes people happy, he said. That's why he sells matsutake, he said: for the sheer pleasure it gives people.

Perhaps the happiness factor in smelling matsutake is what pressed Japanese odor engineers to manufacture an artificial matsutake smell. Now you can buy matsutake-flavored potato chips and matsutake-flavored instant miso soup. I've tried them, and I can sense a distant memory of matsutake at the edge of my tongue, but it's nothing like encountering a mushroom. Still, many Japanese have only known matsutake in this form, or as the frozen mushrooms used in matsutake rice or matsutake pizza. They wonder what the fuss is all about and feel indulgently critical toward those who go on and on about matsutake. Nothing can smell all that good.

Matsutake lovers in Japan know this scorn and cultivate a defensive exuberance about the mushroom. The smell of matsutake, they say, recalls times past that these young people never knew, much to their detriment.

Matsutake, they say, smells like village life and a childhood visiting grandparents and chasing dragonflies. It recalls open pinewoods, now crowded out and dying. Many small memories come together in the smell. It brings to mind the paper dividers on village interior doors, one woman explained; her grandmother would change the papers every New Year and use them to wrap the next year's mushrooms. It was an easier time, before nature became degraded and poisonous.

Nostalgia can be put to good uses. Or so explained Makoto Ogawa, the elder statesman of matsutake science in Kyoto. When I met him, he had just retired. Worse yet, he had cleaned out his office and thrown away books and scientific articles. But he was a walking library of matsutake science and history. Retirement had made it easier for him to talk about his passions. His matsutake science, he explained, had always involved advocacy for both people and nature. He had dreamed that showing people how to nurture matsutake forests might revitalize connections between city and countryside — as urban people became interested in rural life, and villagers had a valuable product to sell. Meanwhile, even as matsutake research could be funded by economic excitement, it had many benefits for basic science, especially in understanding relations among living things in changing ecologies. If nostalgia was a part of this project, so much the better. This was his nostalgia too. He took my research team to see what once was a thriving matsutake forest behind an old temple. Now the hill was alternately dark with planted conifers and choked with evergreen broadleaf trees, with only a few dying pines. We found no matsutake. Once, he recalled, that hillside was teeming with mushrooms. Like Proust's madeleines, matsutake are redolent with *temps perdu*.

Dr. Ogawa savors nostalgia with considerable irony and laughter. As we stood in the rain beside the matsutake-less temple forest, he explained the Korean origin of Japanese regard for matsutake. Before you hear the story, consider that there is no love lost between Japanese nationalists and Koreans. For Dr. Ogawa to remind us that Korean aristocrats started Japanese civilization works against the grain of Japanese desire. Besides, civilization, in his tale, is not all for the good. Long before they came to central Japan, Dr. Ogawa related, Koreans had cut down their forests to build temples and fuel iron forging. They had developed in their homeland the human-disturbed open pine forests in which matsutake grow long before such forests emerged in Japan. When Koreans expanded to Japan in the eighth century, they cut down forests. Pine forests sprung up from such deforestation, and with them matsutake. Koreans smelled the matsutake — and they thought of home. The first nostalgia: the first love of matsutake. It was in longing for Korea that Japan's new aristocracy first glorified the now famous autumn aroma, Dr. Ogawa told us. No wonder, too, that Japanese abroad are so obsessed with matsutake, he added. He ended with a funny story about a Japanese American matsutake hunter he met in Oregon who, in a badly garbled mixture of Japanese and English, saluted Dr. Ogawa's research, saying, "We Japanese are matsutake crazy!"

Dr. Ogawa's stories tickled me because they situated nostalgia, but they also drove home another point: matsutake grows only in deeply

disturbed forests. Matsutake and red pine are partners in central Japan, and both grow only where people have caused significant deforestation. All over the world, indeed, matsutake are associated with the most disturbed kinds of forests: places where glaciers, volcanoes, sand dunes — or human actions — have done away with other trees and even organic soil. The pumice flats I walked in central Oregon are in some ways typical of the kind of land matsutake knows how to inhabit: land on which most plants and other fungi can find no hold. On such impoverished landscapes, the indeterminacies of encounter loom. What pioneer has found its way here, and how can it live? Even the hardiest of seedlings is unlikely to make it unless it finds a partner in an equally hardy fungus to draw nutrients from the rocky ground. (What leaf? What mushroom?) The indeterminacy of fungal growth matters too. Might it encounter the roots of a receptive tree? A change in substrate or potential nutrition? Through its indeterminate growth, the fungus learns the landscape.

There are humans to encounter as well. Will they inadvertently nurture the fungus while cutting firewood and gathering green manure? Or will they introduce hostile plantings, import exotic diseases, or pave the area for suburban development? Humans matter on these landscapes. And humans (like fungi and trees) bring histories with them to meet the challenges of the encounter. These histories, both human and not human, are never robotic programs but rather condensations in the indeterminate here and now; the past we grasp, as philosopher Walter Benjamin puts it, is a memory “that flashes in a moment of danger.”⁶ We enact history, Benjamin writes, as “a tiger’s leap into that which has gone before.”⁷ Science studies scholar Helen Verran offers another image: Among Australia’s Yolngu people, she relates, the recollection of the ancestor’s dreaming is condensed for present challenges in a rite at the climax of which a spear is thrown into the center of the storytellers’ circle. The toss of the spear merges the past in the here and now.⁸ Through smell, all of us know that spear’s throw, that tiger’s leap. The past we bring to encounters is condensed in smell. To smell childhood visits with one’s grandparents condenses a great chunk of Japanese history, not just the vitality of village life in the mid-twentieth century, but the nineteenth-century deforestation that came before, denuding the landscape, and the urbanization and abandonment of the forests that later followed.

While some Japanese may smell nostalgia in the forests made by their disturbances, this is not, of course, the only feeling that people bring to such wild places. Consider the smell of matsutake again. It is time to tell you that most people of European origin can’t stand the smell. A Norwegian gave the Eurasian species its first scientific name, *Tricholoma nauseosum*, the nauseating Trich. (In recent years, taxonomists made an exception to usual rules of precedence to rename the mushroom, acknowledging Japanese testes, as *Tricholoma matsutake*.) Americans of European descent tend to be equally unimpressed by the smell of the Pacific Northwest’s *Tricholoma magnivelare*. “Mold,” “turpentine,” “mud,” white pickers said, when I asked them to characterize the smell. More

than one moved our conversation to the foul smell of rotting fungi. Some were familiar with California mycologist David Arora's characterization of the smell as "a provocative compromise between 'red hots' and dirty socks."⁹ Not exactly something you would want to eat. When Oregon's white pickers prepare the mushroom as food, they pickle it or smoke it. The processing masks the smell, making the mushroom anonymous.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that U.S. scientists have studied the smell of matsutake to see what it repels (slugs), but Japanese scientists have studied the smell to consider what it attracts (some flying insects).¹⁰ Is it the "same" smell if people bring such different sensibilities to the encounter? Does that problem stretch to slugs and gnats as well as people? What if noses — as in my experience — change? What if the mushroom too can change through its encounters?

Matsutake in Oregon associate with many host trees. Oregon pickers can distinguish the host tree with which a particular matsutake has grown — partly from the size and shape, but partly from the smell. The subject came up one day when I examined some truly bad-smelling matsutake being offered for sale. The picker explained that he found these mushrooms under white fir, an unusual host tree for matsutake. Loggers, he said, call white fir "piss fir" because of the bad smell the wood emits when you cut it. The mushrooms smelled as bad as a wounded fir. To me, they did not smell like matsutake at all. But wasn't this smell some piss fir-matsutake combination, made in the encounter?

There is an intriguing nature-culture knot in such indeterminacies. Different ways of smelling and different qualities of smell are wrapped up together. It seems impossible to describe the smell of matsutake without telling all the cultural-and-natural histories condensed together in it. Any attempt at definitive untangling — perhaps like artificial matsutake scent — is likely to lose the point: the indeterminate experience of encounter, with its tiger's leap into history. What else is smell?

The smell of matsutake wraps and tangles memory and history — and not just for humans. It assembles many ways of being in an affect-laden knot that packs its own punch. Emerging from encounter, it shows us history-in-the-making. Smell it.

**THE SMELL OF MATSUTAKE WRAPS AND
TANGLES MEMORY AND HISTORY — AND
NOT JUST FOR HUMANS.**

NOTES

Epigraph: John Cage, "Mushroom haiku," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNzVQ8wRCBo>.

¹ See <http://www.lcdf.org/indeterminacy/>. For a live performance, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJMekwS6b9U>.

² This translation is found on p. 97 of R. H. Blyth, "Mushrooms in Japanese verse," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, 3rd ser., 11 (1973): 93–106.

³ For Cage's discussion of the translation, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNzVQ8wRCBo>.

⁴ Alan Rayner, *Degrees of freedom: Living in dynamic boundaries* (London: Imperial College Press, 1997).

⁵ Kyorai Mukai, reproduced and translated in Blyth, "Mushrooms," 98.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, "On the concept of history," *Gesammelten Schriften*, trans. Dennis Redmond, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), sec. 6, 1:2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, sec. 14. He is comparing fashion and revolution here; each harvests from the past to meet the present.

⁸ Verran, personal communication, 2010. Verran develops the concept of the here and now in many of her writings concerning the Yolngu. Thus, for example: "Yolngu knowledge is the intrusion of the Dreaming into the secular. The Dreaming is brought into the here and now by the doing of particular things at particular times by particular people. . . . Knowledge can only ever be a performance of the Dreaming, a bringing to life in the here and now of the elements of the other domain" (Verran quoted in Caroline Josephs, "Silence as a way of knowing in Yolngu indigenous Australian storytelling," in *Negotiating the Sacred II*, ed. Elizabeth Coleman and Maria Fernandez-Dias, 173–190 [Canberra: ANU Press, 2008], on 181).

⁹ David Arora, *Mushrooms demystified* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1986), 191.

¹⁰ William F. Wood and Charles K. Lefevre, "Changing volatile compounds from mycelium and sporocarp of American matsutake mushroom, *Tricholoma magnivelare*," *Biochemical Systematics and Ecology* 35 (2007): 634–636. I have not found the Japanese research but was told about it by Dr. Ogawa. I don't know if the same chemicals were isolated as the essence of the smell.

QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. If this selection presents difficulties to a reader (and, in our experience, it may), one place the difficulties come from is the specialized vocabulary, from the importance of unusual words or phrases: "scalability," "precarity," "contaminated diversity," or "indeterminacy," to cite a few examples.

But the selection also speaks about familiar things, places, and concepts: Oregon forests, mushrooms, Japan and Korea, plantations (and their history), the smell of food as a way of remembering the past. One of Tsing's goals, she says, is to "tell stories about the world." Read the selection twice. As you read it for the first time, read quickly to focus on the thoughts and experiences (the frames of reference) that you share with Tsing.

Then, read through a second time, and this time to pay attention to her key terms. Mark them as you read, then list them. Note the sentences and paragraphs that provide you access to what they might mean and to how (and why) Tsing might use them. It is here, with these key terms, that Tsing is doing the conceptual work, where she is working to find new ways of thinking about common experience. The context of these words (rather than a dictionary or the Internet) will give you a way to begin writing out (and thinking through) their meaning.

Be prepared to present at least two key terms by reading a selected passage from the text. The goal of your presentation is to explain how you understand what Tsing is saying and doing with each key term.

2. Anna Tsing references many other writers and thinkers. In the opening pages, you will find references, for example, to Richard Dawkins, Hjalmar Jonsson, William Geddes, Fernand Braudel, and Niels Bohr. As you reread the essay, choose four people she refers to whose names are new to you. Then, (by yourself or perhaps with a partner) track them down and prepare a brief presentation for the class. Who are they? Where did they work and what kind of work did they do? What is it about their work that, as you read the selection, you think spoke to Anna Tsing?

3. Let's call these three chapters "essays." As you reread, choose one as a point of focus and prepare a way to both talk about and to visually represent its "structure." Where does it begin and end? What are the key moments of transition or development? Mark these points as you read. Now, what does the structure look like?

These are not, strictly speaking, essays organized by thesis statement, example, and conclusion. Of the chapter you chose, be prepared to think out loud about these questions: What *is* its method? How did this method serve the writer? How might it serve a reader? How does it work for you?

ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. At a key point in the opening chapter, Anna Tsing speaks directly to her readers, and she says:

I hope at this point you are saying, "This is hardly news! I can think of plenty of similar examples from the landscape and people around me." I agree; contaminated diversity is everywhere. If such stories are so widespread and so well known, the question becomes: Why don't we use these stories in how we know the world?" (p. 585)

This is both an invitation and a challenge. Informed by Tsing's writing, what examples can you bring to this discussion? Make a list of three examples taken from your knowledge and experience. Talk about them with friends and classmates. And choose one as the basis of an essay where you write, in Tsing's terms, about "contaminated diversity." And, in the end, after you have written about the example you have chosen, return for two or three paragraphs to Tsing. What conclusions does she draw? She says, for instance, that stories of contaminated diversity can be "complicated, often ugly, and humbling."

But this is your essay, and you should have the final word. In a final paragraph, take center stage and speak out to your readers. Where do you find yourself in relation to what she says? What seems finally to be still beyond you — beyond your comprehension or your beliefs?

2. After two chapters, "Contamination as Collaboration" and "Some Problems with Scale," Anna Tsing offers an *Interlude*, "Smelling." In our textbook, it is the final chapter we include, and so it stands more as an "Afterword" than an interlude.

She begins by asking "What is the story of smell?"
She ends with

The smell of matsutake wraps and tangles memory and history — and not just for humans. It assembles many ways of being in an affect-laden knot that packs its own punch. Emerging from an encounter, it shows us history-in-the making. Smell it. (p. 597)

What is Tsing doing here? What is the point? What is the argument, as you understand it — or as you struggle to understand it?

Write an essay for a student audience, for your cohort, where you present the chapter, “Smelling,” and use it to think back on and to explain what you see Tsing to be saying in the previous two chapters. You should be sure to work from specific passages in both “Smelling” and in previous chapters, and you should also be sure to leave time at the end to speak from your own experience with the essay. You’ve worked your way through it. What do you have to say to those who might be turning to it for the first time?

3. Read through the assignment above and consider the questions it poses. Then, write an essay of your own, one that tells a story of smell and of smelling, as a smell might be said to “wrap and entangle memory and history.” Your story should be inspired by Tsing, presented as an *homage* or a rejoinder. But it should be primarily a “story.” Let it have the shape and sound of a story, with characters, scenes, and dialogue. In Tsing’s spirit, though, it should also, even in brief, engage stories that others tell.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Science writing has been said to be an impossible practice. To understand what a scientist understands, you have to *be* a scientist — to have that training and to be similarly engaged in the laboratory or in the field. How, then, can a science writer prepare a general audience to understand advanced research?

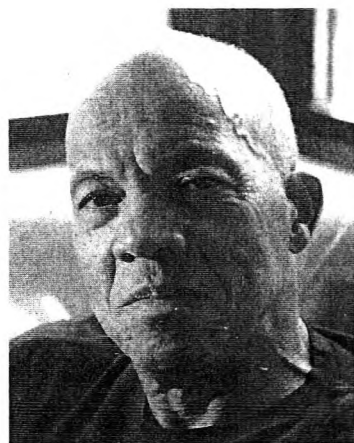
Read Tsing’s essay alongside Atul Gawande’s “Slow Ideas” (p. 325). You might best begin by thinking about how, as writers, they have different methods and styles, different techniques — different ways of addressing a reader, providing engagement and explanation, building bridges. Choose two or three distinctive and characteristic examples from each text.

Write an essay where you think through these examples for someone, like yourself, beginning a career as a scholar and a writer. What are the important lessons to be learned?

2. Tsing writes, “staying alive — for every species — requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die.” While Tsing’s work might be categorized as ecological or scientific, there are certainly other writers in this collection who take up questions of diversity and contact. Mary Louise Pratt’s notion of “contact zones” (p. 454) might be particularly salient here. Or Gloria Anzaldúa’s approach to thinking about language and borders (p. 22).

Write an essay in which you consider Tsing alongside Anzaldúa, Pratt, or another writer in the collection who you believe to be offering a theory of difference — albeit in a very different way from Tsing. What are the connections between the two pieces? What is each writer’s approach to difference? How can you use one writer to help us understand the other more fully? What might a conversation between these two writers on the subject of difference look like?

JOHN EDGAR Wideman



Anthony Barboza/Archive Photos/Getty Images

John Edgar Wideman was born in 1941 in Washington, D.C., but spent most of his youth in Homewood, a neighborhood in Pittsburgh. He earned a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and taught at the University of Wyoming and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He is currently Asa Messer Professor and professor of Africana studies and English at Brown University and sits on the board of the literary journal *Conjunctions*. In addition to the nonfiction work *Brothers and Keepers* (1984), from which this selection is drawn, Wideman has published a number of critically acclaimed works of fiction, including *The Lynchers* (1986); *Reuben* (1989); *Fever: Twelve Stories* (1989); *Philadelphia Fire: A Novel* (1991); and a series of novels set in Homewood: *Damballah* (1981), *Hiding Place* (1982), and *Sent for You Yesterday* (which won the 1984 PEN/Faulkner Award). The latter novels have been reissued as a set, titled *The Homewood Trilogy*. His most recent books include *The Cattle Killing* (1996), *Two Cities* (1998), *Hoop Roots* (2001), *The Island, Martinique* (2003), *God's Gym* (2005), *Fanon* (2008), *Briefs* (2010), and *American Histories* (2018). In 1994, Wideman published another work of nonfiction, *Fatheralong: A Meditation on Fathers and Sons, Race and Society*.

In the preface to *The Homewood Trilogy*, Wideman writes,

The value of black life in America is judged, as life generally in this country is judged, by external, material signs of success. Urban ghettos are dangerous, broken-down, economically marginal pockets of real estate infected with drugs, poverty, violence, crime, and since black life is seen as rooted in the ghetto, black people are identified with the ugliness, danger, and deterioration surrounding them. This logic is simpleminded and devastating, its hold on the American imagination as old as slavery; in fact, it recycles the classic justification for slavery, blaming the cause and consequences of oppression on the oppressed. Instead of launching a preemptive strike at the flawed assumptions that perpetuate racist thinking, blacks and whites are doomed to battle endlessly with the symptoms of racism.

In these three books again bound as one I have set myself to the task of making concrete those invisible planes of existence that bear witness to the fact that black life, for all its material impoverishment,

continues to thrive, to generate alternative styles, redemptive strategies, people who hope and cope. But more than attempting to prove a "humanity," which should be self-evident anyway to those not blinded by racism, my goal is to celebrate and affirm. *Where did I come from? Who am I? Where am I going?*

Brothers and Keepers is a family story; it is about Wideman and his brother Robby. John went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, and Robby went to prison for his role in a robbery and a murder. In the section that follows, "Our Time," Wideman tries to understand his brother, their relationship, where they came from, where they are going. In this account, you will hear the voices of Robby, John, and people from the neighborhood, but also the voice of the writer, speaking about the difficulty of writing and the dangers of explaining away Robby's life.

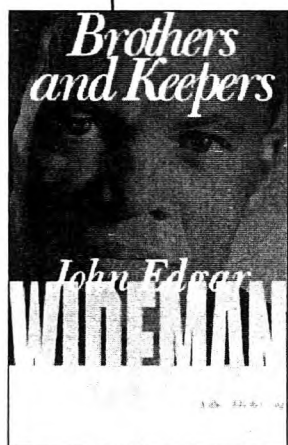
Brothers and Keepers is not the first time Wideman has written to or about his brother. The first of the Homewood series, *Damballah*, is dedicated to Robby. The dedication reads:

Stories are letters. Letters sent to anybody or everybody. But the best kind are meant to be read by a specific somebody. When you read that kind you know you are eavesdropping. You know a real person somewhere will read the same words you are reading and the story is that person's business and you are a ghost listening in.

Remember. I think it was Geral I first heard call a watermelon a letter from home. After all these years I understand a little better what she meant. She was saying the melon is a letter addressed to us. A story for us from down home. Down Home being everywhere we've never been, the rural South, the old days, slavery, Africa. That juicy, striped message with red meat and seeds, which always looked like roaches to me, was blackness as cross and celebration, a history we could taste and chew. And it was meant for us. Addressed to us. We were meant to slit it open and take care of business.

Consider all these stories as letters from home. I never liked watermelon as a kid. I think I remember you did. You weren't afraid of becoming instant nigger, of sitting barefoot and goggle-eyed and Day-Glo black and drippy-lipped on massa's fence if you took one bite of the forbidden fruit. I was too scared to enjoy watermelon. Too self-conscious. I let people rob me of a simple pleasure. Watermelon's still tainted for me. But I know better now. I can play with the idea even if I can't get down and have a natural ball eating a real one.

Anyway . . . these stories are letters. Long overdue letters from me to you. I wish they could tear down the walls. I wish they could snatch you away from where you are.



• • • • •

Our Time

You remember what we were saying about young black men in the street-world life. And trying to understand why the "square world" becomes completely unattractive to them. It has to do with the fact that their world is the GHETTO and in that world all the glamour, all the praise and attention is given to the slick guy, the gangster especially, the ones that get over in the "life." And it's because we can't help but feel some satisfaction seeing a brother, a black man, get over on these people, on their system without playing by their rules. No matter how much we have incorporated these rules as our own, we know that they were forced on us by people who did not have our best interests at heart. So this hip guy, this gangster or player or whatever label you give these brothers that we like to shun because of the poison that they spread, we, black people, still look at them with some sense of pride and admiration, our children openly, us adults somewhere deep inside. We know they represent rebellion — what little is left in us. Well, having lived in the "life," it becomes very hard — almost impossible — to find any contentment in joining the status quo. Too hard to go back to being nobody in a world that hates you. Even if I had struck it rich in the life, I would have managed to throw it down the fast lane. Or have lost it on a revolutionary whim. Hopefully the latter.

I have always burned up in my fervent passions of desire and want. My senses at times tingle and itch with my romantic, idealistic outlook on life, which has always made me keep my distance from reality, reality that was a constant insult to my world, to my dream of happiness and peace, to my people-for-people kind of world, my easy-cars-for-a-nickel-or-a-dime sorta world. And these driving passions, this sensitivity to the love and good in people, also turned on me because I used it to play on people and their feelings. These aspirations of love and desire turned on me when I wasn't able to live up to this sweet-self morality, so I began to self-destruct, burning up in my sensitivity, losing direction, because nowhere could I find this world of truth and love and harmony.

In the real world, the world left for me, it was unacceptable to be "good," it was square to be smart in school, it was jive to show respect to people outside the street world, it was cool to be cold to your woman and the people that loved you. The things we liked we called "bad." "Man, that was a bad girl." The world of the angry black kid growing up in the sixties was a world in which to be in was to be out — out of touch with the square world and all of its rules on what's right and wrong. The thing was to make your own rules, do your own thing, but make sure it's contrary to what society says or is.

Garth looked bad. Real bad. Ichabod Crane anyway, but now he was a skeleton. Lying there in the bed with his bones poking through his skin, it made you want to cry. Garth's barely able to talk, his smooth, medium-brown skin yellow as pee. Ichabod legs and long hands and long feet, Garth could make you laugh just walking down the street. On the set you'd see him coming a far way off. Three-quarters leg so you knew it had to be Garth the way he was split up higher in the crotch than anybody else. Wilt the Stilt with a lean bird body perched on top his high waist. Size-fifteen shoes. Hands could palm a basketball easy as holding a pool cue. Fingers long enough to wrap round a basketball, but Garth couldn't play a lick. Never could get all that lankiness together on the court. You'd look at him sometimes as he was trucking down Homewood Avenue and think that nigger ain't walking, he's trying to remember how to walk. Awkward as a pigeon on roller skates. Knobby joints out of whack, arms and legs flailing, going their separate ways, his body jerking to keep them from going too far. Moving down the street like that wouldn't work, didn't make sense if you stood back and watched, if you pretended you hadn't seen Garth get where he was going a million times before. Nothing funny now, though. White hospital sheets pulled to his chest. Garth's head always looked small as a tennis ball way up there on his shoulders. Now it's a yellow, shrunken skull.

Ever since Robby had entered the ward, he'd wanted to reach over and hide his friend's arm under the covers. For two weeks Gar had been wasting away in the bed. Bad enough knowing Gar was dying. Didn't need that pitiful stick arm reminding him how close to nothing his main man had fallen. So fast. It could happen so fast. If Robby tried to raise that arm it would come off in his hand. As gentle as he could would not be gentle enough. The arm would disintegrate, like a long ash off the end of a cigarette.

Time to leave. No sense in sitting any longer. Garth not talking, no way of telling whether he was listening either. And Robby has nothing more to say. Choked up the way he gets inside hospitals. Hospital smell and quiet, the bare halls and bare floors, the echoes, something about all that he can't name, wouldn't try to name, rises in him and chills him. Like his teeth are chattering the whole time he's inside a hospital. Like his entire body is trembling uncontrollably, only nobody can see it or hear it but him. Shaking because he can't breathe the stuffy air. Hot and cold at the same time. He's been aching to leave since he entered the ward. Aching to get up and bust through the big glass front doors. Aching to pounce on that spidery arm flung back behind Gar's head. The arm too wasted to belong to his friend. He wants to grab it and hurl it away.

Robby pulls on tight white gloves the undertaker had dealt out to him and the rest of the pallbearers. His brown skin shows through the thin material, turns the white dingy. He's remembering that last time in Garth's ward. The hospital stink. Hot, chilly air. A bare arm protruding from the sleeve of the hospital gown, more dried-up toothpick than arm, a

withered twig, with Garth's fingers like a bunch of skinny brown bananas drooping from the knobby tip.

Robby had studied the metal guts of the hospital bed, the black scuff marks swirling around the chair's legs. When he'd finally risen to go, his chair scraping against the vinyl floor broke a long silence. The noise must have roused Garth's attention. He'd spoken again.

You're good, man. Don't ever forget, Rob. You're the best.

Garth's first words since the little banter back and forth when Robby had entered the ward and dragged a chair to the side of Gar's bed. A whisper scarcely audible now that Robby was standing. Garth had tried to grin. The best he could manage was a pained adjustment of the bones of his face, no more than a shadow scudding across the yellow skull, but Robby had seen the famous smile. He hesitated, stopped rushing toward the door long enough to smile back. Because that was Gar. That was the way Gar was. He always had a smile and a good word for his cut buddies. Garth's grin was money in the bank. You could count on it like you could count on a good word from him. Something in his face would tell you you were alright, better than alright, that he believed in you, that you were, as he'd just whispered, "the best." You could depend on Garth to say something to make you feel good, even though you knew he was lying. With that grin greasing the lie you had to believe it, even though you knew better. Garth was the gang's dreamer. When he talked, you could see his dreams. That's why Robby had believed it, seen the grin, the bright shadow lighting Garth's face an instant. Out of nothing, out of pain, fear, the certainty of death gripping them both, Garth's voice had manufactured the grin.

Now they had to bury Garth. A few days after the visit to the hospital the phone rang and it was Garth's mother with the news of her son's death. Not really news. Robby had known it was just a matter of time. Of waiting for the moment when somebody else's voice would pronounce the words he'd said to himself a hundred times. *He's gone. Gar's dead.* Long gone before the telephone rang. Gar was gone when they stuck him up in the hospital bed. By the time they'd figured out what ailed him and admitted him to the hospital, it was too late. The disease had turned him to a skeleton. Nothing left of Garth to treat. They hid his messy death under white sheets, perfumed it with disinfectant, pumped him full of drugs so he wouldn't disturb his neighbors.

The others had squeezed into their pallbearers' gloves. Cheap white cotton gloves so you could use them once and throw them away like the rubber ones doctors wear when they stick their fingers up your ass. Michael, Cecil, and Sowell were pallbearers, too. With Robby and two men from Garth's family they would carry the coffin from Gaines Funeral Parlor to the hearse. Garth had been the dreamer for the gang. Robby counted four black fingers in the white glove. Garth was the thumb. The hand would be clumsy, wouldn't work right without him. Garth was different. But everybody else was different, too. Mike, the ice man, supercool. Cecil indifferent, ready to do most anything or nothing and couldn't care

less which it was. Sowell wasn't really part of the gang; he didn't hang with them, didn't like to take the risks that were part of the "life." Sowell kept a good job. The "life" for him was just a way to make quick money. He didn't shoot up; he thought of himself as a businessman, an investor not a partner in their schemes. They knew Sowell mostly through Garth. Perhaps things would change now. The four survivors closer after they shared the burden of Gar's coffin, after they hoisted it and slid it on steel rollers into the back of Gaines's Cadillac hearse.

Robby was grateful for the gloves. He'd never been able to touch anything dead. He'd taken a beating once from his father rather than touch the bloody mousetrap his mother had nudged to the back door with her toe and ordered him to empty. The brass handle of the coffin felt damp through the glove. He gripped tighter to stop the flow of blood or sweat, whatever it was leaking from him or seeping from the metal. Garth had melted down to nothing by the end so it couldn't be him nearly yanking off Robby's shoulder when the box shifted and its weight shot forward. Felt like a coffin full of bricks. Robby stared across at Mike but Mike was a soldier, eyes front, riveted to the yawning rear door of the hearse. Mike's eyes wouldn't admit it, but they'd almost lost the coffin. They were rookie pallbearers and maneuvering down the carpeted front steps of Gaines Funeral Parlor they'd almost let Garth fly out their hands. They needed somebody who knew what he was doing. An old, steady head to show them the way. They needed Garth. But Garth was long gone. Ashes inside the steel box.

They began drinking later that afternoon in Garth's people's house. Women and food in one room, men hitting the whiskey hard in another. It was a typical project apartment. The kind everybody had stayed in or visited one time or another. Small, shabby, featureless. Not a place to live. No matter what you did to it, how clean you kept it or what kind of furniture you loaded it with, the walls and ceilings were not meant to be home for anybody. A place you passed through. Not yours, because the people who'd been there before you left their indelible marks everywhere and you couldn't help adding your bruises and knots for the next tenants. You could rent a kitchen and bedroom and a bathroom and a living room, the project flats were laid out so you had a room for each of the things people did in houses. Problem was, every corner was cut. Living cramped is one thing and people can get cozy in the closest quarters. It's another thing to live in a place designed to be just a little less than adequate. No slack, no space to personalize, to stamp the flat with what's peculiar to your style. Like a man sitting on a toilet seat that's too small and the toilet too close to the bathtub so his knees shove against the enamel edge. He can move his bowels that way and plenty of people in the world have a lot less but he'll never enjoy sitting there, never feel the deep down comfort of belonging where he must squat.

Anyway, the whiskey started flowing in that little project apartment. Robby listened, for Garth's sake, as long as he could to old people reminiscing about funerals they'd attended, about all the friends and relatives they'd escorted to the edge of Jordan, old folks sipping good whiskey and

moaning and groaning till it seemed a sin to be left behind on this side of the river after so many saints had crossed over. He listened to people express their grief, tell sad, familiar stories. As he got high he listened less closely to the words. Faces and gestures revealed more than enough. When he split with Mike and Cecil and their ladies, Sowell tagged along. By then the tacky, low-ceilinged rooms of the flat were packed. Loud talk, laughter, storytellers competing for audiences. Robby half expected the door he pushed shut behind himself to pop open again, waited for bottled-up noise to explode into the funky hallway.

Nobody thinking about cemeteries now. Nobody else needs to be buried today, so it was time to get it on. Some people had been getting close to rowdy. Some people had been getting mad. Mad at one of the guests in the apartment, mad at doctors and hospitals and whites in general who had the whole world in their hands but didn't have the slightest idea what to do with it. A short, dark man, bubble-eyed, immaculately dressed in a three-piece, wool, herringbone suit, had railed about the callousness, the ignorance of white witch doctors who, by misdiagnosing Garth's illness, had sealed his doom. His harangue had drawn a crowd. He wasn't just talking, he was testifying, and a hush had fallen over half the room as he dissected the dirty tricks of white folks. If somebody ran to the hospital and snatched a white-coated doctor and threw him into the circle surrounding the little fish-eyed man, the mourners would tear the pale-faced devil apart. Robby wished he could feed them one. Remembered Garth weak and helpless in the bed and the doctors and nurses flitting around in the halls, jiving the other patients, ignoring Gar like he wasn't there. Garth was dead because he had believed them. Dead because he had nowhere else to turn when the pain in his gut and the headaches grew worse and worse. Not that he trusted the doctors or believed they gave a flying fuck about him. He'd just run out of choices and had to put himself in their hands. They told him jaundice was his problem, and while his liver rotted away and pain cooked him dizzy Garth assured anyone who asked that it was just a matter of giving the medicine time to work. To kill the pain he blew weed as long as he had strength to hold a joint between his lips. Take a whole bunch of smoke to cool me out these days. Puffing like a chimney till he lost it and fell back and Robby scrambling to grab the joint before Garth torched himself.

When you thought about it, Garth's dying made no sense. And the more you thought the more you dug that nothing else did neither. The world's a stone bitch. Nothing true if that's not true. The man had you coming and going. He owned everything worth owning and all you'd ever get was what he didn't want anymore, what he'd chewed and spit out and left in the gutter for niggers to fight over. Garth had pointed to the street and said, If we ever make it, it got to come from there, from the curb. We got to melt that rock till we get us some money. He grinned then, Ain't no big thing. We'll make it, brother man. We got what it takes. It's our time.

Something had crawled in Garth's belly. The man said it wasn't nothing. Sold him some aspirins and said he'd be alright in no time. The man

killed Garth. Couldn't kill him no deader with a .357 magnum slug, but ain't no crime been committed. Just one those things. You know, everybody makes mistakes. And a dead nigger ain't really such a big mistake when you think about it. Matter of fact you mize well forget the whole thing. Nigger wasn't going nowhere, nohow. I mean he wasn't no brain surgeon or astronaut, no movie star or big-time athlete. Probably a dope fiend or gangster. Wind up killing some innocent person or wasting another nigger. Shucks. That doctor ought to get a medal.

Hey, man. Robby caught Mike's eye. Then Cecil and Sowell turned to him. They knew he was speaking to everybody. Late now. Ten, eleven, because it had been dark outside for hours. Quiet now. Too quiet in his pad. And too much smoke and drink since the funeral. From a bare bulb in the kitchen ceiling light seeped down the hallway and hovered dimly in the doorway of the room where they sat. Robby wondered if the others felt as bad as he did. If the cemetery clothes itched their skin. If they could smell grave dust on their shoes. He hoped they'd finish this last jug of wine and let the day be over. He needed sleep, downtime to get the terrible weight of Garth's death off his mind. He'd been grateful for the darkness. For the company of his cut buddies after the funeral. For the Sun Ra tape until it ended and plunged them into a deeper silence than any he'd ever known. Garth was gone. In a few days people would stop talking about him. He was in the ground. Stone-cold dead. Robby had held a chunk of crumbly ground in his white-gloved fingers and mashed it and dropped the dust into the hole. Now the ground had closed over Garth and what did it mean? Here one day and gone the next and that was that. They'd bury somebody else out of Gaines tomorrow. People would dress up and cry and get drunk and tell lies and next day it'd be somebody else's turn to die. Which one of the shadows in this black room would go first? What did it matter? Who cared? Who would remember their names; they were ghosts already. Dead as Garth already. Only difference was, Garth didn't have it to worry about no more. Garth didn't have to pretend he was going anywhere cause he was there. He'd made it to the place they all were headed fast as their legs could carry them. Every step was a step closer to the stone-cold ground, the pitch-black hole where they'd dropped Garth's body.

Hey, youall. We got to drink to Garth one last time.

They clinked glasses in the darkness. Robby searched for something to say. The right words wouldn't come. He knew there was something proper and precise that needed to be said. Because the exact words eluded him, because only the right words would do, he swallowed his gulp of heavy, sweet wine in silence.

He knew he'd let Garth down. If it had been one of the others dead, Michael or Cecil or Sowell or him, Garth wouldn't let it slide by like this, wouldn't let it end like so many other nights had ended, the fellows nodding off one by one, stupefied by smoke and drink, each one beginning to shop around in his mind, trying to figure whether or not he should turn in

or if there was a lady somewhere who'd welcome him in her bed. No. Garth would have figured a way to make it special. They wouldn't be hiding in the bushes. They'd be knights in shining armor around a big table. They'd raise their giant, silver cups to honor the fallen comrade. Like in the olden days: Clean, brave dudes with gold rings and gold chains. They'd draw their blades. Razor-edged swords that gleam in the light with jewels sparkling in the handles. They'd make a roof over the table when they stood and raised their swords and the points touched in the sky. A silver dagger on a satin pillow in the middle of the table. Everybody roll up their sleeves and prick a vein and go round, each one touching everybody else so the blood runs together and we're brothers forever, brothers as long as blood flows in anybody's arm. We'd ride off and do unbelievable shit. The dead one always with us cause we'd do it all for him. Swear we'd never let him down.

It's our time now. We can't let Garth down. Let's drink this last one for him and promise him we'll do what he said we could. We'll be the best. We'll make it to the top for him. We'll do it for Garth.

Glasses rattled together again. Robby empties his and thinks about smashing it against a wall. He'd seen it done that way in movies but it was late at night and these crazy niggers might not know when to stop throwing things. A battlefield of broken glass for him to creep through when he gets out of bed in the morning. He doesn't toss the empty glass. Can't see a solid place anyway where it would strike clean and shatter to a million points of light.

My brother had said something about a guy named Garth during one of my visits to the prison. Just a name mentioned in passing. *Garth* or *Gar*. I'd asked Robby to spell it for me. Garth had been a friend of Robby's, about Robby's age, who died one summer of a mysterious disease. Later when Robby chose to begin the story of the robbery and killing by saying, "It all started with Gar dying," I remembered that first casual mention and remembered a conversation with my mother. My mom and I were in the kitchen of the house on Tokay Street. My recollection of details was vague at first but something about the conversation had made a lasting impression because, six years later, hearing Robby say the name *Garth* brought back my mother's words.

My mother worried about Robby all the time. Whenever I visited home, sooner or later I'd find myself alone with Mom and she'd pour out her fears about Robby's *wildness*, the deep trouble he was bound for, the web of entanglements and intrigues and bad company he was weaving around himself with a maddening disregard for the inevitable consequences.

I don't know. I just don't know how to reach him. He won't listen. He's doing wrong and he knows it but nothing I say makes any difference. He's not like the rest of youall. You'd misbehave but I could talk to you or smack you if I had to and you'd straighten up. With Robby it's like talking to a wall.

I'd listen and get angry at my brother because I registered not so much the danger he was bringing on himself, but the effect of his escapades on the woman who'd brought us both into the world. After all, Robby was no baby. If he wanted to mess up, nobody could stop him. Also Robby was my brother, meaning that his wildness was just a stage, a chaotic phase of his life that would only last till he got his head together and decided to start doing right. Doing as the rest of us did. He was my brother. He couldn't fall too far. His brushes with the law (I'd had some, too), the time he'd spent in jail, were serious but temporary setbacks. I viewed his troubles, when I thought about them at all, as a form of protracted juvenile delinquency, and fully expected Robby would learn his lesson sooner or later and return to the fold, the prodigal son, chastened, perhaps a better person for the experience. In the meantime the most serious consequence of his wildness was Mom's devastating unhappiness. She couldn't sustain the detachment, the laissez-faire optimism I had talked myself into. Because I was two thousand miles away, in Wyoming, I didn't have to deal with the day-to-day evidence of Robby's trouble. The syringe Mom found under his bed. The twenty-dollar bill missing from her purse. The times he'd cruise in higher than a kite, his pupils reduced to pinpricks, with his crew and they'd raid the refrigerator and make a loud, sloppy feast, all of them feeling so good they couldn't imagine anybody not up there on cloud nine with them enjoying the time of their lives. Cruising in, then disappearing just as abruptly, leaving their dishes and pans and mess behind. Robby cover-

I WASN'T AROUND FOR ALL THAT.

DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW HOW

BAD THINGS WERE FOR HIM.

ing Mom with kisses and smiles and drowning her in babytalk hootchey-coo as he staggers through the front door. Her alone in the ravaged, silent kitchen, listening as doors slam and a car squeals off on the cobblestones of Tokay, wonder-

ing where they're headed next, wishing, praying Robby will return and eat and eat and eat till he falls asleep at the table so she can carry him upstairs and tuck him in and kiss his forehead and shut the door gently on his sleep.

I wasn't around for all that. Didn't want to know how bad things were for him. Worrying about my mother was tough enough. I could identify with her grief, I could blame my brother. An awful situation, but simple too. My role, my responsibilities and loyalties were clear. The *wildness* was to blame, and it was a passing thing, so I just had to help my mother survive the worst of it, then everything would be alright. I'd steel myself for the moments alone with her when she'd tell me the worst. In the kitchen, usually, over a cup of coffee with the radio playing. When my mother was alone in the house on Tokay, either the TV or a radio or both were always on. Atop the kitchen table a small clock radio turned to WAMO, one of Pittsburgh's soul stations, would background with scratchy gospel music whatever we said in the morning in the kitchen. On a morning like that in 1975, while I drank a cup of coffee and part of me, still half-asleep, hidden, swayed to the soft beat of gospel, my mother had explained how upset Robby was over the death of his friend, Garth.

It was a terrible thing. I've known Garth's mother for years. He was a good boy. No saint for sure, but deep down a good boy. Like your brother. Not a mean bone in his body. Out there in the street doing wrong, but that's where most of them are. What else can they do, John? Sometimes I can't blame them. No jobs, no money in their pockets. How they supposed to feel like men? Garth did better than most. Whatever else he was into, he kept that little job over at Westinghouse and helped out his mother. A big, playful kid. Always smiling. I think that's why him and Robby were so tight. Neither one had good sense. Giggled and acted like fools. Garth no wider than my finger. Straight up and down. A stringbean if I ever saw one. When Robby lived here in the house with me, Garth was always around. I know how bad Robby feels. He hasn't said a word but I know. When Robby's quiet, you know something's wrong. Soon as his eyes pop open in the morning he's looking for the party. First thing in the morning he's chipper and chattering. Looking for the party. That's your brother. He had a match in Garth.

Shame the way they did that boy. He'd been down to the clinic two or three times but they sent him home. Said he had an infection and it would take care of itself. Something like that anyway. You know how they are down there. Have to be spitting blood to get attention. Then all they give you is a Band-Aid. He went back two times, but they kept telling him the same dumb thing. Anybody who knew Garth could see something awful was wrong. Circles under his eyes. Sallow look to his skin. Losing weight. And the poor thing didn't have any weight to lose. Last time I saw him I was shocked. Just about shocked out my shoes. Wasn't Garth standing in front of me. Not the boy I knew.

Well, to make a long story short, they finally took him in the hospital but it was too late. They let him walk the streets till he was dead. It was wrong. Worse than wrong how they did him, but that's how those dogs do us every day God sends here. Garth's gone, so nothing nobody can say will do any good. I feel so sorry for his mother. She lived for that boy. I called her and tried to talk but what can you say? I prayed for her and prayed for Garth and prayed for Robby. A thing like that tears people up. It's worse if you keep it inside. And that's your brother's way. He'll let it eat him up and then go out and do something crazy.

Until she told me Garth's story I guess I hadn't realized how much my mother had begun to change. She had always seemed to me to exemplify the tolerance, the patience, the long view epitomized in her father. John French's favorite saying was, Give 'em the benefit of the doubt. She could get as ruffled, as evil as the rest of us, cry and scream or tear around the house fit to be tied. She had her grudges and quarrels. Mom could let it all hang out, yet most of the time she radiated a deep calm. She reacted strongly to things but at the same time held judgment in abeyance. Events, personalities always deserved a second, slower appraisal, an evaluation outside the sphere of everyday hassles and vexations. You gave people the benefit of the doubt. You attempted to remove your ego, acknowledge the limitations of your individual view of things. You consulted as far as you

were equipped by temperament and intelligence a broader, more abiding set of relationships and connections.

You tried on the other person's point of view. You sought the other, better person in yourself who might talk you into relinquishing for a moment your selfish interest in whatever was at issue. You stopped and considered the long view, possibilities other than the one that momentarily was leading you by the nose. You gave yourself and other people the benefit of the doubt.

My mother had that capacity. I'd admired, envied, and benefited infinitely from its presence. As she related the story of Garth's death and my brother's anger and remorse, her tone was uncompromisingly bitter. No slack, no margin of doubt was being granted to the forces that destroyed Garth and still pursued her son. She had exhausted her reserves of understanding and compassion. The long view supplied the same ugly picture as the short. She had an enemy now. It was that revealed truth that had given the conversation its edge, its impact. *They* had killed Garth, and his dying had killed part of her son; so the battle lines were drawn. Irreconcilably. Absolutely. The backside of John French's motto had come into play. Giving someone the benefit of the doubt was also giving him enough rope to hang himself. If a person takes advantage of the benefit of the doubt and keeps on taking and taking, one day the rope plays out. The piper must be paid. If you've been the one giving, it becomes incumbent on you to grip your end tight and take away. You turn the other cheek, but slowly, cautiously, and keep your fist balled up at your side. If your antagonist decides to smack rather than kiss you or leave you alone, you make sure you get in the first blow. And make sure it's hard enough to knock him down.

Before she told Garth's story, my mother had already changed, but it took years for me to realize how profoundly she hated what had been done to Garth and then Robby. The gentleness of my grandfather, like his fair skin and good French hair, had been passed down to my mother. Gentleness styled the way she thought, spoke, and moved in the world. Her easy disposition and sociability masked the intensity of her feelings. Her attitude to authority of any kind, doctors, clerks, police, bill collectors, newscasters, whites in general partook of her constitutional gentleness. She wasn't docile or cowed. The power other people possessed or believed they possessed didn't frighten her; she accommodated herself, offered something they could accept as deference but that was in fact the same resigned, alert attention she paid to roaches or weather or poverty, any of the givens outside herself that she couldn't do much about. She never engaged in public tests of will, never pushed herself or her point of view on people she didn't know. Social awkwardness embarrassed her. Like most Americans she didn't like paying taxes, was suspicious of politicians, resented the disparity between big and little people in our society and the double standard that allowed big shots to get away with murder. She paid particular attention to news stories that reinforced her basic political assumption that power corrupts. On the

other hand she knew the world was a vale of tears and one's strength, granted by God to deal with life's inevitable calamities, should not be squandered on small stuff.

In spite of all her temperamental and philosophic resistance to extremes, my mother would be radicalized. What the demonstrations, protest marches, and slogans of the sixties had not effected would be accomplished by Garth's death and my brother's troubles. She would become an aggressive, acid critic of the status quo in all its forms: from the President ("If it wasn't for that rat I'd have a storm door to go with the storm windows but he cut the program") on down to bank tellers ("I go there every Friday and I'm one of the few black faces she sees all day and she knows me as well as she knows that wart on her cheek but she'll still make me show my license before she'll cash my check"). A son she loved would be pursued, captured, tried, and imprisoned by the forces of law and order. Throughout the ordeal her love for him wouldn't change, couldn't change. His crime tested her love and also tested the nature, the intent of the forces arrayed against her son. She had to make a choice. On one side were the stark facts of his crime: robbery, murder, flight; her son an outlaw, a fugitive; then a prisoner. On the other side the guardians of society, the laws, courts, police, judges, and keepers who were responsible for punishing her son's transgression.

She didn't invent the two sides and initially didn't believe there couldn't be a middle ground. She extended the benefit of the doubt. Tried to situate herself somewhere in between, acknowledging the evil of her son's crime while simultaneously holding on to the fact that he existed as a human being before, after, and during the crime he'd committed. He'd done wrong but he was still Robby and she'd always be his mother. Strangely, on the dark side, the side of the crime and its terrible consequences, she would find room to exercise her love. As negative as the elements were, a life taken, the grief of the survivors, suffering, waste, guilt, remorse, the scale was human; she could apply her sense of right and wrong. Her life to that point had equipped her with values, with tools for sorting out and coping with disaster. So she would choose to make her fight there, on treacherous yet familiar ground — familiar since her son was there — and she could place herself, a woman, a mother, a grieving, bereaved human being, there beside him.

Nothing like that was possible on the other side. The legitimacy of the other side was grounded not in her experience of life, but in a set of rules seemingly framed to sidestep, ignore, or replace her sense of reality. Accepting the version of reality encoded in *their* rules would be like stepping into a cage and locking herself in. Definitions of her son, herself, of need and frailty and mercy, of blackness and redemption and justice had all been neatly formulated. No need here for her questions, her uncertainty, her fear, her love. Everything was clean and clear. No room for her sense that things like good and evil, right and wrong bleed into each other and create a dreadful margin of ambiguity no one could name but could only enter, enter at the risk of everything because everything is at stake

and no one on earth knows what it means to enter or what will happen if and when the testing of the margin is over.

She could love her son, accept his guilt, accept the necessity of punishment, suffer with him, grow with him past the stage of blaming everyone but himself for his troubles, grieve with him when true penitence began to exact its toll. Though she might wish penance and absolution could be achieved in private, without the intervention of a prison sentence, she understood dues must be paid. He was her son but he was also a man who had committed a robbery in the course of which another woman's son had been killed. What would appall her and what finally turned her against the forces of law and order was the incapacity of the legal system to grant her son's humanity. "Fair" was the word she used — a John French word. She expected them to treat Robby fair. Fairness was what made her willing to give him up to punishment even though her love screamed no and her hands clung to his shoulders. Fairness was what she expected from the other side in their dealings with her and her son.

She could see their side, but they steadfastly refused to see hers. And when she realized fairness was not forthcoming, she began to hate. In the lack of reciprocity, in the failure to grant that Robby was first a man, then a man who had done wrong, the institutions and individuals who took over control of his life denied not only his humanity but the very existence of the world that had nurtured him and nurtured her — the world of touching, laughing, suffering black people that established Robby's claim to something more than a number.

Mom expects the worst now. She's peeped their hole card. She understands they have a master plan that leaves little to accident, that most of the ugliest things happening to black people are not accidental but the predictable results of the working of the plan. What she learned about authority, about law and order didn't make sense at first. It went against her instincts, what she wanted to believe, against the generosity she'd observed in her father's interactions with other Homewood people. He was fair. He'd pick up the egg rolls he loved from the back kitchen door of Mr. Wong's restaurant and not blame Wong, his old talking buddy and card-playing crony, for not serving black people in his restaurant. Wong had a family and depended on white folks to feed them, so Wong didn't have any choice and neither did John French if he wanted those incredible egg rolls. He treated everyone, high and low, the same. He said what he meant and meant what he said. John French expected no more from other people than he expected from himself. And he'd been known to mess up many a time, but that was him, that was John French, no better, no worse than any man who pulls on his britches one leg at a time. He needed a little slack, needed the benefit of that blind eye people who love, or people who want to get along with other people, must learn to cast. John French was grateful for the slack, so was quick to extend it to others. Till they crossed him.

My mother had been raised in Homewood. The old Homewood. Her relations with people in that close-knit, homogeneous community were based on trust, mutual respect, common spiritual and material concerns.

Face-to-face contact, shared language and values, a large fund of communal experience rendered individual lives extremely visible in Homewood. Both a person's self-identity ("You know who you are") and accountability ("Other people know who you are") were firmly established.

If one of the Homewood people said, "That's the French girl" or, "There goes John French's daughter," a portrait with subtle shading and complex resonance was painted by the words. If the listener addressed was also a Homewood resident, the speaker's voice located the young woman passing innocently down Tioga Street in a world invisible to outsiders. A French girl was somebody who lived in Cassina Way, somebody you didn't fool with or talk nasty to. Didn't speak to at all except in certain places or on certain occasions. French girls were church girls, Homewood African Methodist Episcopal Zion Sunday-school-picnic and social-event young ladies. You wouldn't find them hanging around anywhere without escorts or chaperones. French girls had that fair, light, bright, almost white red-bone complexion and fine blown hair and nice big legs but all that was to be appreciated from a distance because they were nice girls and because they had this crazy daddy who wore a big brown country hat and gambled and drank wine and once ran a man out of town, ran him away without ever laying a hand on him or making a bad-mouthed threat, just cut his eyes a certain way when he said the man's name and the word went out and the man who had cheated a drunk John French with loaded dice was gone. Just like that. And there was the time Elias Brown was cleaning his shotgun in his backyard. Brown had his double-barreled shotgun across his knees and a jug of Dago Red on the ground beside him and it was a Saturday and hot and Brown was sweating through his BVD undershirt and paying more attention to the wine than he was to the gun. Next thing you know, *Boom!* Off it goes and buckshot sprayed down Cassina Way, and it's Saturday and summer like I said, so chillens playing everywhere but God watches over fools and babies so nobody hit bad. Nobody hit at all except the little French girl, Geraldine, playing out there in the alley and she got nicked in her knee. Barely drew blood. A sliver of that buckshot musta ricocheted off the cobblestones and cut her knee. Thank Jesus she the only one hit and she ain't hit bad. Poor Elias Brown don't quite know what done happened till some the mens run over in his yard and snatch the gun and shake the wine out his head. What you doing, fool? Don't you know no better all those children running round here? Coulda killed one these babies. Elias stone drunk and don't hear nothing, see nothing till one the men say French girl. Nicked the little French girl, Geraldine. Then Elias woke up real quick. His knees, his dusty butt, everything he got starts to trembling and his eyes get big as dinner plates. Then he's gone like a turkey through the corn. Nobody seen Elias for a week. He's in Ohio at his sister's next time anybody hear anything about Elias. He's cross there in Ohio and still shaking till he git word John French ain't after him. It took three men gon over there telling the same story to get Elias back to Homewood. John French ain't mad. He was mad but he ain't mad now. Little girl just nicked is all and French ain't studying you, Brown.

You heard things like that in Homewood names. Rules of etiquette, thumbnail character sketches, a history of the community. A dire warning to get back could be coded into the saying of a person's name, and a further inflection of the speaker's voice could tell you to ignore the facts, forget what he's just reminded you to remember and go on. Try your luck.

Because Homewood was self-contained and possessed such a strong personality, because its people depended less on outsiders than they did on each other for so many of their most basic satisfactions, they didn't notice the net settling over their community until it was already firmly in place. Even though the strands of the net — racial discrimination, economic exploitation, white hate and fear — had existed time out of mind, what people didn't notice or chose not to notice was that the net was being drawn tighter, that ruthless people outside the community had the power to choke the life out of Homewood, and as soon as it served their interests would do just that. During the final stages, as the net closed like a fist around Homewood, my mother couldn't pretend it wasn't there. But instead of setting her free, the truth trapped her in a cage as tangible as the iron bars of Robby's cell.

Some signs were subtle, gradual. The A & P started to die. Nobody mopped filth from the floors. Nobody bothered to restock empty shelves. Fewer and fewer white faces among the shoppers. A plate-glass display window gets broken and stays broken. When they finally close the store, they paste the going-out-of-business notice over the jagged, taped crack. Other signs as blatant, as sudden as fire engines and patrol cars breaking your sleep, screaming through the dark Homewood streets. First Garth's death, then Robby's troubles brought it all home. My mother realized her personal unhappiness and grief were inseparable from what was happening *out there*. Out there had never been further away than the thousand insults and humiliations she had disciplined herself to ignore. What she had deemed petty, not worth bothering about, were strings of the net just as necessary, as effective as the most dramatic intrusions into her life. She decided to stop letting things go by. No more benefit of the doubt. Doubt had been cruelly excised. She decided to train herself to be as wary, as unforgiving as she'd once been ready to live and let live. My mother wouldn't become paranoid, not even overtly prickly or bristling. That would have been too contrary to her style, to what her blood and upbringing had instilled. The change was inside. What she thought of people. How she judged situations. Things she'd say or do startled me, set me back on my heels because I didn't recognize my mother in them. I couldn't account for the stare of pure unadulterated hatred she directed at the prison guard when he turned away from her to answer the phone before handing her the rest-room key she'd requested, the vehemence with which she had cussed Richard Nixon for paying no taxes when she, scraping by on an income of less than four thousand dollars a year, owed the IRS three hundred dollars.

Garth's death and Robby's troubles were at the center of her new vision. Like a prism, they caught the light, transformed it so she could

trace the seemingly random inconveniences and impositions coloring her life to their source in a master plan.

I first heard Garth's story in the summer of 1975, the summer my wife carried our daughter Jamila in her belly, the summer before the robbery and killing. The story contained all the clues I'm trying to decipher now. Sitting in the kitchen vaguely distracted by gospel music from the little clock radio atop the table, listening as my mother expressed her sorrow, her indignation at the way Garth was treated, her fears for my brother, I was hearing a new voice. Something about the voice struck me then, but I missed what was novel and crucial. I'd lost my Homewood ear. Missed all the things unsaid that invested her words with special urgency. People in Homewood often ask: You said that to say what? The impacted quality of an utterance either buries a point too obscurely or insists on a point so strongly that the listener wants the meat of the message repeated, wants it restated clearly so it stands alone on its own two feet. If I'd been alert enough to ask that question, to dig down to the root and core of Garth's story after my mother told it, I might have understood sooner how desperate and dangerous Homewood had become. Six years later my brother was in prison, and when he began the story of his troubles with Garth's death, a circle completed itself; Robby was talking to me, but I was still on the outside, looking in.

That day six years later, I talked with Robby three hours, the maximum allotted for weekday visits with a prisoner. It was the first time in life we'd ever talked that long. Probably two and a half hours longer than the longest, unbroken, private conversation we'd ever had. And it had taken guards, locks, and bars to bring us together. The ironies of the situation, the irony of that fact, escaped neither of us.

I listened mostly, interrupting my brother's story a few times to clarify dates or names. Much of what he related was familiar. The people, the places. Even the voice, the words he chose were mine in a

way. We're so alike, I kept thinking, anticipating what he would say next, how he would say it, filling in naturally, easily with my words what he left unsaid. Trouble was our minds weren't interchangeable. No more than our bodies. The guards wouldn't have allowed me to stay in my brother's place. He was the criminal. I was the visitor from outside. Different as night and day. As Robby talked I let myself forget that difference. Paid too much attention to myself listening and lost some of what he was saying. What I missed would have helped define the difference. But I missed it. It was easy to half listen. For both of us to pretend to be closer than we were. We needed the closeness. We were brothers. In the prison visiting lounge I acted toward my brother the way I'd been acting toward him all my life, heard what I wanted to hear, rejected the rest.

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When Robby talked, the similarity of his Homewood and mine was a trap. I could believe I knew exactly what he was describing. I could relax into his story, walk down Dunfermline or Tioga, see my crippled grandmother sitting on the porch of the house on Finance, all the color her pale face had lost blooming in the rosebush beneath her in the yard, see Robby in the downstairs hall of the house on Marchand, rapping with his girl on the phone, which sat on a three-legged stand just inside the front door. I'd slip unaware out of his story into one of my own. I'd be following him, an obedient shadow, then a cloud would blot the sun and I'd be gone, unchained, a dark form still skulking behind him but no longer in tow.

The hardest habit to break, since it was the habit of a lifetime, would be listening to myself listen to him. That habit would destroy any chance of seeing my brother on his terms; and seeing him in his terms, learning his terms, seemed the whole point of learning his story. However numerous and comforting the similarities, we were different. The world had seized on the difference, allowed me room to thrive, while he'd been forced into a cage. Why did it work out that way? What was the nature of the difference? Why did it haunt me? Temporarily at least, to answer these questions, I had to root my fiction-writing self out of our exchanges. I had to teach myself to listen. Start fresh, clear the pipes, resist too facile an identification, tame the urge to take off with Robby's story and make it my own.

I understood all that, but could I break the habit? And even if I did learn to listen, wouldn't there be a point at which I'd have to take over the telling? Wasn't there something fundamental in my writing, in my capacity to function, that depended on flight, on escape? Wasn't another person's skin a hiding place, a place to work out anxiety, to face threats too intimidating to handle in any other fashion? Wasn't writing about people a way of exploiting them?

A stranger's gait, or eyes, or a piece of clothing can rivet my attention. Then it's like falling down to the center of the earth. Not exactly fear or panic but an uneasy, uncontrollable momentum, a sense of being swallowed, engulfed in blackness that has no dimensions, no fixed points. That boundless, incarcerating black hole is another person. The detail grabbing me functions as a door and it swings open and I'm drawn, sucked, pulled in head over heels till suddenly I'm righted again, on track again and the peculiarity, the ordinariness of the detail that usurped my attention becomes a window, a way of seeing out of another person's eyes, just as for a second it had been my way in. I'm scooting along on short, stubby legs and the legs are not anybody else's and certainly not mine, but I feel for a second what it's like to motor through the world atop these peculiar duck thighs and foreshortened calves and I know how wobbly the earth feels under those run-over-at-the-heel, split-seamed penny loafers. Then just as suddenly I'm back. I'm me again, slightly embarrassed, guilty because I've been trespassing and don't know how long I've been gone or if anybody noticed me violating somebody else's turf.

Do I write to escape, to make a fiction of my life? If I can't be trusted with the story of my own life, how could I ask my brother to trust me with his?

The business of making a book together was new for both of us. Difficult. Awkward. Another book could be constructed about a writer who goes to a prison to interview his brother but comes away with his own story. The conversations with his brother would provide a stage for dramatizing the writer's tortured relationship to other people, himself, his craft. The writer's motives, the issue of exploitation, the inevitable conflict between his role as detached observer and his responsibility as a brother would be at the center of such a book. When I stopped hearing Robby and listened to myself listening, that kind of book shouldered its way into my consciousness. I didn't like the feeling. That book compromised the intimacy I wanted to achieve with my brother. It was as obtrusive as the Wearever pen in my hand, the little yellow sheets of Yard Count paper begged from the pad of the guard in charge of overseeing the visiting lounge. The borrowed pen and paper (I was not permitted into the lounge with my own) were necessary props. I couldn't rely on memory to get my brother's story down and the keepers had refused my request to use a tape recorder, so there I was. Jimmy Olson, cub reporter, poised on the edge of my seat, pen and paper at ready, asking to be treated as a brother.

We were both rookies. Neither of us had learned very much about sharing our feelings with other family members. At home it had been assumed that each family member possessed deep, powerful feelings and that very little or nothing at all needed to be said about these feelings because we all were stuck with them and talk wouldn't change them. Your particular feelings were a private matter and family was a protective fence around everybody's privacy. Inside the perimeter of the fence each family member resided in his or her own quarters. What transpired in each dwelling was mainly the business of its inhabitant as long as nothing generated within an individual unit threatened the peace or safety of the whole. None of us knew how traditional West African families were organized or what values the circular shape of their villages embodied, but the living arrangements we had worked out among ourselves resembled the ancient African patterns. You were granted emotional privacy, independence, and space to commune with your feelings. You were encouraged to deal with as much as you could on your own, yet you never felt alone. The high wall of the family, the collective, communal reality of other souls, other huts like yours eliminated some of the dread, the isolation experienced when you turned inside and tried to make sense out of the chaos of your individual feelings. No matter how grown you thought you were or how far you believed you'd strayed, you knew you could cry *Mama* in the depths of the night and somebody would tend to you. Arms would wrap round you, a soft soothing voice lend its support. If not a flesh-and-blood mother then a mother in the form of song or story or a surrogate, Aunt Geral, Aunt Martha, drawn from the network of family numbers.

Privacy was a bridge between you and the rest of the family. But you had to learn to control the traffic. You had to keep it uncluttered, resist the temptation to cry wolf. Privacy in our family was a birthright, a union card granted with family membership. The card said you're one of us but also

certified your separateness, your obligation to keep much of what defined your separateness to yourself.

An almost aesthetic consideration's involved. Okay, let's live together. Let's each build a hut and for security we'll arrange the individual dwellings in a circle and then build an outer ring to enclose the whole village. Now your hut is your own business, but let's in general agree on certain outward forms. Since we all benefit from the larger pattern, let's compromise, conform to some degree on the materials, the shape of each unit. Because symmetry and harmony please the eye. Let's adopt a style, one that won't crimp anybody's individuality, one that will buttress and enhance each member's image of what a living place should be.

So Robby and I faced each other in the prison visiting lounge as familiar strangers, linked by blood and time. But how do you begin talking about blood, about time? He's been inside his privacy and I've been inside mine, and neither of us in thirty-odd years had felt the need to exchange more than social calls. We shared the common history, values, and style developed within the tall stockade of family, and that was enough to make us care about each other, enough to insure a profound depth of mutual regard, but the feelings were undifferentiated. They'd seldom been tested specifically, concretely. His privacy and mine had been exclusive, sanctioned by family traditions. Don't get too close. Don't ask too many questions or give too many answers. Don't pry. Don't let what's inside slop out on the people around you.

The stories I'd sent to Robby were an attempt to reveal what I thought about certain matters crucial to us both. Our shared roots and destinies. I wanted him to know what I'd been thinking and how that thinking was drawing me closer to him. I was banging on the door of his privacy. I believed I'd shed some of my own.

We were ready to talk. It was easy to begin. Impossible. We were neophytes, rookies. I was a double rookie. A beginner at this kind of intimacy, a beginner at trying to record it. My double awkwardness kept getting in the way. I'd hidden the borrowed pen by dropping my hand below the level of the table where we sat. Now when in hell would be the right moment to raise it? To use it? I had to depend on my brother's instincts, his generosity. I had to listen, listen.

Luckily there was catching up to do. He asked me about my kids, about his son, Omar, about the new nieces and nephews he'd never seen. That helped. Reminded us we were brothers. We got on with it. Conditions in the prisons. Robby's state of mind. The atmosphere behind the prison walls had been particularly tense for over a year. A group of new, younger guards had instituted a get-tough policy. More strip searches, cell shake-downs, strict enforcement of penny-ante rules and regulations. Grown men treated like children by other grown men. Inmates yanked out of line and punished because a button is undone or hair uncombed. What politicians demanded in the free world was being acted out inside the prison. A crusade, a war on crime waged by a gang of gung-ho guards against men who were already certified casualties, prisoners of war. The walking

wounded being beaten and shot up again because they're easy targets. Robby's closest friends, including Cecil and Mike, are in the hole. Others who were considered potential troublemakers had been transferred to harsher prisons. Robby was warned by a guard. We ain't caught you in the shit yet, but we will. We know what you're thinking and we'll catch you in it. Or put you in it. Got your buddies and we'll get you.

The previous summer, 1980, a prisoner, Leon Patterson, had been asphyxiated in his cell. He was an asthma sufferer, a convicted murderer who depended on medication to survive the most severe attacks of his illness. On a hot August afternoon when the pollution index had reached its highest count of the summer, Patterson was locked in his cell in a cell block without windows and little air. At four o'clock, two hours after he'd been confined to the range, he began to call for help. Other prisoners raised the traditional distress signal, rattling tin cups against the bars of their cells. Patterson's cries for help became screams, and his fellow inmates beat on the bars and shouted with him. Over an hour passed before any guards arrived. They carted away Patterson's limp body. He never revived and was pronounced dead at 10:45 that evening. His death epitomized the polarization in the prison. Patterson was seen as one more victim of the guards' inhumanity. A series of incidents followed in the ensuing year, hunger strikes, melees between guards and prisoners, culminating in a near massacre when the dog days of August hung once more over the prison.

One of the favorite tactics of the militant guards was grabbing a man from the line as the prisoners moved single-file through an archway dividing the recreation yard from the main cell blocks. No reason was given or needed. It was a simple show of force, a reminder of the guards' absolute power, their right to treat the inmates any way they chose, and do it with impunity. A sit-down strike in the prison auditorium followed one of the more violent attacks on an inmate. The prisoner who had resisted an arbitrary seizure and strip search was smacked in the face. He punched back and the guards jumped him, knocked him to the ground with their fists and sticks. The incident took place in plain view of over a hundred prisoners and it was the last straw. The victim had been provoked, assaulted, and surely would be punished for attempting to protect himself, for doing what any man would and should do in similar circumstances. The prisoner would suffer again. In addition to the physical beating they'd administered, the guards would attack the man's record. He'd be written up. A kangaroo court would take away his *good time*, thereby lengthening the period he'd have to wait before becoming eligible for probation or parole. Finally, on the basis of the guards' testimony he'd probably get a sixty-day sojourn in the hole. The prisoners realized it was time to take a stand. What had happened to one could happen to any of them. They rushed into the auditorium and locked themselves in. The prisoners held out till armed state troopers and prison guards in riot gear surrounded the building. Given the mood of that past year and the unmistakable threat in the new warden's voice as he repeated through a loudspeaker his refusal to

meet with the prisoners and discuss their grievances, everybody inside the building knew that the authorities meant business, that the forces of law and order would love nothing better than an excuse to turn the auditorium into a shooting gallery. The strike was broken. The men filed out. A point was driven home again. Prisoners have no rights the keepers are bound to respect.

That was how the summer had gone. Summer was bad enough in the penitentiary in the best of times. Warm weather stirred the prisoners' blood. The siren call of the streets intensified. Circus time. The street blooming again after the long, cold winter. People outdoors. On their stoops. On the corners. In bright summer clothes or hardly any clothes at all. The free-world sounds and sights more real as the weather heats up. Confinement a torture. Each cell a hotbox. The keepers take advantage of every excuse to keep you out of the yard, to deprive you of the simple pleasure of a breeze, the blue sky. Why? So that the pleasant weather can be used as a tool, a boon to be withheld. So punishment has a sharper edge. By a perverse turn of the screw something good becomes something bad. Summer a bitch at best, but this past summer as the young turks among the guards ran roughshod over the prisoners, the prison had come close to blowing, to exploding like a piece of rotten fruit in the sun. And if the lid blew, my brother knew he'd be one of the first to die. During any large-scale uprising, in the first violent, chaotic seconds no board of inquiry would ever be able to reconstruct, scores would be settled. A bullet in the back of the brain would get rid of troublemakers, remove potential leaders, uncontrollable prisoners the guards hated and feared. You were supremely eligible for a bullet if the guards couldn't press your button. If they hadn't learned how to manipulate you, if you couldn't be bought or sold, if you weren't into drug and sex games, if you weren't cowed or depraved, then you were a threat.

Robby understood that he was sentenced to die. That all sentences were death sentences. If he didn't buckle under, the guards would do everything in their power to kill him. If he succumbed to the pressure to surrender dignity, self-respect, control over his own mind and body, then he'd become a beast, and what was good in him would die. The death sentence was unambiguous. The question for him became: How long could he survive in spite of the death sentence? Nothing he did would guarantee his safety. A disturbance in a cell block halfway across the prison could provide an excuse for shooting him and dumping him with the other victims. Anytime he was ordered to go with guards out of sight of other prisoners, his escorts could claim he attacked them, or attempted to escape. Since the flimsiest pretext would make murdering him acceptable, he had no means of protecting himself. Yet to maintain sanity, to minimize their opportunities to destroy him, he had to be constantly vigilant. He had to discipline himself to avoid confrontations, he had to weigh in terms of life and death every decision he made; he had to listen and obey his keepers' orders, but he also had to determine in certain threatening situations whether it was better to say no and keep himself out of a trap or take his

chances that this particular summons was not the one inviting him to his doom. Of course to say no perpetuated his reputation as one who couldn't be controlled, a bad guy, a guy you never turn your back on, one of the prisoners out to get the guards. That rap made you more dangerous in the keepers' eyes and therefore increased the likelihood they'd be frightened into striking first. Saying no put you in no less jeopardy than going along with the program. Because the program was contrived to kill you. Directly or indirectly, you knew where you were headed. What you didn't know was the schedule. Tomorrow. Next week. A month. A minute. When would one of them get itchy, get beyond waiting a second longer? Would there be a plan, a contrived incident, a conspiracy they'd talk about and set up as they drank coffee in the guards' room or would it be the hair-trigger impulse of one of them who held a grudge, harbored an antipathy so elemental, so irrational that it could express itself only in a burst of pure, unrestrained violence?

If you're Robby and have the will to survive, these are the possibilities you must constantly entertain. Vigilance is the price of survival. Beneath the vigilance, however, is a gnawing awareness boiling in the pit of your stomach. You can be as vigilant as you're able, you can keep fighting the good fight to survive, and still your fate is out of your hands. If they decide to come for you in the morning, that's it. Your ass is grass and those minutes, and hours, days and years you painfully stitched together to put off the final reckoning won't matter at all. So the choice, difficult beyond words, to say yes or say no is made in light of the knowledge that in the end neither your yes nor your no matters. Your life is not in your hands.

The events, the atmosphere of the summer had brought home to Robby the futility of resistance. Power was absurdly apportioned all on one side. To pretend you could control your own destiny was a joke. You learned to laugh at your puniness, as you laughed at the stink of your farts lighting up your cell. Like you laughed at the seriousness of the masturbation ritual that romanticized, cloaked in darkness and secrecy, the simple, hungry shaking of your penis in your fist. You had no choice, but you always had to decide to go on or stop. It had been a stuttering, stop, start, maybe, fuck it, bitch of a summer, and now, for better or worse, we were starting up something else. Robby backtracks his story from Garth to another beginning, the house on Copeland Street in Shadyside where we lived when he was born.

I know that had something to do with it. Living in Shadyside with only white people around. You remember how it was. Except for us and them couple other families it was a all-white neighborhood. I got a thing about black. See, black was like the forbidden fruit. Even when we went to Freed's in Homewood, Geraldine and them never let me go no farther than the end of the block. All them times I stayed over there I didn't go past Mr. Conrad's house by the vacant lot or the other corner where Billy Shields and them stayed. Started to wondering what was so different about a black neighborhood. I was just a little kid and I was curious.

I really wanted to know why they didn't want me finding out what was over there. Be playing with the kids next door to Freed, you know, Sonny and Gumpy and them, but all the time I'm wondering what's round the corner, what's up the street. Didn't care if it was *bad* or good or dangerous or what, I had to find out. If it's something bad I figured they would have told me, tried to scare me off. But nobody said nothing except, No. Don't you go no farther than the corner. Then back home in Shadyside nothing but white people so I couldn't ask nobody what was special about black. Black was a mystery and in my mind I decided I'd find out what it was all about. Didn't care if it killed me, I was going to find out.

One time, it was later, I was close to starting high school, I overheard Mommy and Geraldine and Sissy talking in Freed's kitchen. They was talking about us moving from Shadyside back to Homewood. The biggest thing they was worried about was me. How would it be for me being in Homewood and going to Westinghouse? I could tell they was scared. Specially Mom. You know how she is. She didn't want to move. Homewood scared her. Not so much the place but how I'd act if I got out there in the middle of it. She already knew I was wild, hard to handle. There'd be too much mess for me to get into in Homewood. She could see trouble coming.

And she was right. Me and trouble hooked up. See, it was a question of being somebody. Being my own person. Like youns had sports and good grades sewed up. Wasn't nothing I could do in school or sports that youns hadn't done already. People said, Here comes another Wideman. He's gon be a good student like his brothers and sister. That's the way it was spozed to be. I was another Wideman, the last one, the baby, and everybody knew how I was spozed to act. But something inside me said no. Didn't want to be like the rest of youns. Me, I had to be a rebel. Had to get out from under youns' good grades and do. Way back then I decided I wanted to be a star. I wanted to make it big. My way. I wanted the glamour. I wanted to sit high up.

Figured out school and sports wasn't the way. I got to thinking my brothers and sister was squares. Loved youall but wasn't no room left for me. Had to figure out a new territory. I had to be a rebel.

Along about junior high I discovered Garfield. I started hanging out up on Garfield Hill. You know, partying and stuff in Garfield cause that's where the niggers was. Garfield was black, and I finally found what I'd been looking for. That place they was trying to hide from me. It was heaven. You know. Hanging out with the fellows. Drinking wine and trying anything else we could get our hands on. And the ladies. Always a party on the weekends. Had me plenty sweet little soft-leg Garfield ladies. Niggers run my butt off that hill more than a couple times behind messing with somebody's piece but I'd be back next weekend. Cause I'd found heaven. Looking back now, wasn't much to Garfield. Just a rinky-dink ghetto up on a hill, but it was the street. I'd found my place.

Having a little bit of a taste behind me I couldn't wait to get to Homewood. In a way I got mad with Mommy and the rest of them. Seemed to me like they was trying to hold me back from a good time. Seemed like

they just didn't want me to have no fun. That's when I decided I'd go on about my own business. Do it my way. Cause I wasn't getting no slack at home. They still expected me to be like my sister and brothers. They didn't know I thought youns was squares. Yeah. I knew I was hipper and groovier than youns ever thought of being. Streetwise, into something. Had my own territory and I was bad. I was a rebel. Wasn't following in nobody's footsteps but my own. And I was a hip cookie, you better believe it. Wasn't a hipper thing out there than your brother, Rob. I couldn't wait for them to turn me loose in Homewood.

Me being the youngest and all, the baby in the family, people always said, ain't he cute. That Robby gon be a ladykiller. Been hearing that mess since day one so ain't no surprise I started to believing it. Youns had me pegged as a lady's man so that's what I was. The girls be talking the same trash everybody else did. Ain't he cute. Be petting me and spoiling me like I'm still the baby of the family and I sure ain't gon tell them stop. Thought I was cute as the girls be telling me. Thought sure enough, I'm gon be a star. I loved to get up and show my behind. Must have been good at it too cause the teacher used to call me up in front of the class to perform. The kids'd get real quiet. That's probably why the teacher got me up. Keep the class quiet while she nods off. Cause they'd listen to me. Sure nuff pay attention.

Performing always come natural to me. Wasn't nervous or nothing. Just get up and do my thing. They liked for me to do impressions. I could mimic anybody. You remember how I'd do that silly stuff around the house. Anybody I'd see on TV or hear on a record I could mimic to a T. Bob Hope, Nixon, Smokey Robinson, Ed Sullivan. White or black. I could talk just like them or sing a song just like they did. The class yell out a famous name and I'd do the one they wanted to hear. If things had gone another way I've always believed I could have made it big in show business. If you could keep them little frisky kids in Liberty School quiet you could handle any audience. Always could sing and do impressions. You remember Mom asking me to do them for you when you came home from college.

I still be performing. Read poetry in the hole. The other fellows get real quiet and listen. Sing down in there too. Nothing else to do, so we entertain each other. They always asking me to sing or read. "Hey, Wide-man. C'mon man and do something." Then it gets quiet while they waiting for me to start. Quiet and it's already dark. You in your own cell and can't see nobody else. Barely enough light to read by. The other fellows can hear you but it's just you and them walls so it feels like being alone much as it feels like you're singing or reading to somebody else.

Yeah. I read my own poems sometimes. Other times I just start in on whatever book I happen to be reading. One the books you sent me, maybe. Fellows like my poems. They say I write about the things they be thinking. Say it's like listening to their own self thinking. That's cause we all down there together. What else you gonna do but think of the people on the outside. Your woman. Your kids or folks, if you got any. Just the same old sad shit we all be thinking all the time. That's what I write and the fellows like to hear it.

Funny how things go around like that. Go round and round and keep coming back to the same place. Teacher used to get me up to pacify the class and I'm doing the same thing in prison. You said your teachers called on you to tell stories, didn't they? Yeah. It's funny how much we're alike. In spite of everything I always believed that. Inside. The feeling side. I always believed we was the most alike out of all the kids. I see stuff in your books. The kinds of things I be thinking or feeling.

Your teachers got you up, too. To tell stories. That's funny, ain't it. I listen to my brother Robby. He unravels my voice. I sit with him in the darkness of the Behavioral Adjustment Unit. My imagination creates something like a giant seashell, enfolding, enclosing us. Its inner surface is velvet-soft and black. A curving mirror doubling the darkness. Poems are Jean Toomer's petals of dusk, petals of dawn. I want to stop. Savor the sweet, solitary pleasure, the time stolen from time in the hole. But the image I'm creating is a trick of the glass. The mirror that would swallow Robby and then chime to me: You're the fairest of them all. The voice I hear issues from a crack in the glass. I'm two or three steps ahead of my brother, making fiction out of his words. Somebody needs to snatch me by the neck and say, Stop. Stop and listen, listen to him.

The Behavioral Adjustment Unit is, as one guard put it, "a maximum-security prison within a maximum-security prison." The "Restricted

I LISTEN TO MY BROTHER ROBBY.

HE UNRAVELS MY VOICE.

Housing Unit" or "hole" or "Home Block" is a squat, two-story cement building containing thirty-five six-by-eight-foot cells. The governor of Pennsylvania closed the area in

1972 because of "inhumane conditions," but within a year the hole was reopened. For at least twenty-three hours a day the prisoners are confined to their cells. An hour of outdoor exercise is permitted only on days the guards choose to supervise it. Two meals are served three hours apart, then nothing except coffee and bread for the next twenty-one. The regulation that limits the time an inmate can serve in the BAU for a single offense is routinely sidestepped by the keepers. "Administrative custody" is a provision allowing officials to cage men in the BAU indefinitely. Hunger strikes are one means the prisoners have employed to protest the harsh conditions of the penal unit. Hearings prompted by the strikes have produced no major changes in the way the hole operates. Law, due process, the rights of the prisoners are irrelevant to the functioning of this prison within a prison. Robby was sentenced to six months in the BAU because a guard suspected he was involved in an attempted escape. The fact that a hearing, held six months later, established Robby's innocence, was small consolation since he'd already served his time in the hole.

Robby tells me about the other side of being the youngest: Okay, you're everybody's pet and that's boss, but on the other hand you sometimes feel you're the least important. Always last. Always bringing up the rear. You learn to do stuff on your own because the older kids are always busy, off doing their things, and you're too young, left behind because you

don't fit, or just because they forget you're back here, at the end, bringing up the rear. But when orders are given out, you sure get your share. "John's coming home this weekend. Clean up your room." Robby remembers being forced to get a haircut on the occasion of one of my visits. Honor thy brother. Get your hair cut, your room rid up, and put on clean clothes. He'll be here with his family and I don't want the house looking like a pigpen.

I have to laugh at the image of myself as somebody to get a haircut for. Robby must have been fit to be tied.

Yeah, I was hot. I mean, you was doing well and all that, but shit, you were my brother. And it was my head. What's my head got to do with you? But you know how Mommy is. Ain't no talking to her when her mind gets set. Anything I tried to say was "talking *back*," so I just went ahead to the man and got my ears lowered.

I was trying to be a rebel but back then the most important thing still was what the grown-ups thought about me. How they felt meant everything. Everything. Me and Tish and Dave were the ones at home then. You was gone and Gene was gone so it was the three of us fighting for attention. And we fought. Every crumb, everytime something got cut up or parceled out or it was Christmas or Easter, we so busy checking out what the other one got wasn't hardly no time to enjoy our own. Like a dogfight or cat fight all the time. And being the youngest I'm steady losing ground most the time. Seemed like to me, Tish and Dave the ones everybody talked about. Seemed like my time would never come. That ain't the way it really was, I know. I had my share cause I was the baby and ain't he cute and lots of times I know I got away with outrageous stuff or got my way cause I could play that baby mess to the hilt. Still it seemed like Dave and Tish was the ones really mattered. Mommy and Daddy and Sis and Geral and Big Otie and Ernie always slipping some change in their pockets or taking them to the store or letting them stay over all night in Homewood. I was a jealous little rascal. Sometimes I thought everybody thought I was just a spoiled brat. I'd say damn all youall. I'd think, Go on and love those square turkeys, but one day I'll be the one coming back with a suitcase full of money and a Cadillac. Go on and love them good grades. Robby gon do it his own way.

See, in my mind I was Superfly. I'd drive up slow to the curb. My hog be half a block long and these fine foxes in the back. Everybody looking when I ease out the door clean and mean. Got a check in my pocket to give to Mom. Buy her a new house with everything in it new. Pay her back for the hard times. I could see that happening as real as I can see your face right now. Wasn't no way it wasn't gon happen. Rob was gon make it big. I'd be at the door, smiling with the check in my hand and Mommy'd be so happy she'd be crying.

Well, it's a different story ain't it. Turned out different from how I used to think it would. The worst thing I did, the thing I feel most guilty behind is stealing Mom's life. It's like I stole her youth. Can't nothing change that.

I can't give back what's gone. Robbing white people didn't cause me to lose no sleep back then. Couldn't feel but so bad about that. How you gon feel sorry when society's so corrupt, when everybody got their hand out or got their hand in somebody else's pocket and ain't no rules nobody listens to if they can get away with breaking them? How you gon apply the rules? It was dog eat dog out there, so how was I spozed to feel sorry if I was doing what everybody else doing. I just got caught is all. I'm sorry about that, and damned sorry that guy Stavros got killed, but as far as what I did, as far as robbing white people, ain't no way I was gon torture myself over that one.

I tried to write Mom a letter. Not too long ago. Should say I did write the letter and put it in a envelope and sent it cause that's what I did, but I be crying so much trying to write it I don't know what wound up in that letter. I wanted Mom to know I knew what I'd done. In a way I wanted to say I was sorry for spoiling her life. After all she did for me I turned around and made her life miserable. That's the wrongest thing I've done and I wanted to say I was sorry but I kept seeing her face while I was writing the letter. I'd see her face and it would get older while I was looking. She'd get this old woman's face all lined and wrinkled and tired about the eyes. Wasn't nothing I could do but watch. Cause I'd done it and knew I done it and all the letters in the world ain't gon change her face. I sit and think about stuff like that all the time. It's better now. I think about other things too. You know like trying to figure what's really right and wrong, but there be days the guilt don't never go away.

I'm the one made her tired, John. And that's my greatest sorrow. All the love that's in me she created. Then I went and let her down.

When you in prison you got plenty of time to think, that's for damned sure. Too much time. I've gone over and over my life. Every moment. Every little thing again and again. I lay down on my bed and watch it happening over and over. Like a movie. I get it all broke down in pieces then I break up the pieces then I take the pieces of the pieces and run them through my hands so I remember every word a person said to me or what I said to them and weigh the words till I think I know what each and every one meant. Then I try to put it back together. Try to understand where I been. Why I did what I did. You got time for that in here. Time's all you got in here.

Going over and over things sometimes you can make sense. You know. Like the chinky-chinky Chinaman sittin' on the fence. You put it together and you think, yes. That's why I did thus and so. Yeah. That's why I lost that job or lost that woman or broke that one's heart. You stop thinking in terms of something being good or being evil, you just try to say this happened because that happened because something else came first. You can spend days trying to figure out just one little thing you did. People out there in the world walk around in a daze cause they ain't got time to think. When I was out there, I wasn't no different. Had this Superfly thing and that was the whole bit. Nobody could tell me nothing.

Seems like I should start the story back in Shadyside. In the house on Copeland Street. Nothing but white kids around. Them little white

kids had everything, too. That's what I thought, anyway. Nice houses, nice clothes. They could buy pop and comic books and candy when they wanted to. We wasn't that bad off, but compared to what them little white kids had I always felt like I didn't have nothing. It made me kinda quiet and shy around them. Me knowing all the time I wanted what they had. Wanted it bad. There was them white kids with everything and there was the black world Mommy and them was holding back from me. No place to turn, in a way. I guess you could say I was stuck in the middle. Couldn't have what the white kids in Shadyside had, and I wasn't allowed to look around the corner for something else. So I'd start the story with Shadyside, the house on Copeland.

Another place to start could be December 29, 1950 — the date of Robby's birth. For some reason — maybe my mother and father were feuding, maybe we just happened to be visiting my grandmother's house when my mother's time came — the trip to the hospital to have Robby began from Finance Street, from the house beside the railroad tracks in Homewood. What I remember is the bustle, people rushing around, yelling up and down the stairwell, doors slammed, drawers being opened and shut. A cold winter day so lots of coats and scarves and galoshes. My mother's face was very pale above the dark cloth coat that made her look even bigger than she was, carrying Robby the ninth month. On the way out the front door she stopped and stared back over her shoulder like she'd forgotten something. People just about shoving her out the house. Lots of bustle and noise getting her through the crowded hallway into the vestibule. Somebody opened the front door and December rattled the glass panes. Wind gusting and whistling, everybody calling out last-minute instructions, arrangements, goodbyes, blessings, prayers. My mother's white face calm, hovering a moment above it all as she turned back toward the hall, the stairs where I was planted, halfway to the top. She didn't find me, wasn't looking for me. A thought had crossed her mind and carried her far away. She didn't know why so many hands were rushing her out the door. She didn't hear the swirl of words, the icy blast of wind. Wrapped in a navy-blue coat, either Aunt Aida's or an old one of my grandmother's, which didn't have all its black buttons but stretched double over her big belly, my mother was wondering whether or not she'd turned off the water in the bathroom sink and deciding whether or not she should return up the stairs to check. Something like that crossing her mind, freeing her an instant before she got down to the business of pushing my brother into the world.

Both my grandfathers died on December 28. My grandmother died just after dawn on December 29. My sister lost a baby early in January. The end of the year has become associated with mournings, funerals; New Year's Day arrives burdened by a sense of loss, bereavement. Robby's birthday became tainted. To be born close to Christmas is bad enough in and of itself. Your birthday celebration gets upstaged by the orgy of gift giving on Christmas Day. No matter how many presents you receive on

December 29, they seem a trickle after the Christmas flood. Plus there's too much excitement in too brief a period. Parents and relatives are exhausted, broke, still hung over from the Christmas rush, so there just isn't very much left to work with if your birthday comes four short days after Jesus'. Almost like not having a birthday. Or even worse, like sharing it with your brothers and sister instead of having the private oasis of your very own special day. So Robby cried a lot on his birthdays. And it certainly wasn't a happy time for my mother. Her father, John French, died the year after Robby was born, one day before Robby's birthday. Fifteen years and a day later Mom would lose her mother. The death of the baby my sister was carrying was a final, cruel blow, scaring my mother, jinxing the end of the year eternally. She dreaded the holiday season, expected it to bring dire tidings. She had attempted at one point to consecrate the sad days, employ them as a period of reflection, quietly, privately memorialize the passing of the two people who'd loved her most in the world. But the death of my father's father, then the miscarriage within this jinxed span of days burst the fragile truce my mother had effected with the year's end. She withdraws into herself, anticipates the worst as soon as Christmas decorations begin appearing. In 1975, the year of the robbery and murder, Robby was on the run when his birthday fell. My mother was sure he wouldn't survive the deadly close of the year.

Robby's birthday is smack dab in the middle of the hard time. Planted like a flag to let you know the bad time's arrived. His adult life, the manhood of my mother's last child, begins as she is orphaned, as she starts to become nobody's child.

I named Robby. Before the women hustled my mother out the door into a taxi, I jumped down the stairs, tugged on her coattail, and reminded her she'd promised it'd be Robby. No doubt in my mind she'd bring me home a baby brother. Don't ask me why I was certain. I just was. I hadn't even considered names for a girl. Robby it would be. Robert Douglas. Where the Douglas came from is another story, but the Robert came from me because I liked the sound. Robert was formal, dignified, important. Robert. And that was nearly as nice as the chance I'd have to call my little brother Rob and Robby.

He weighed seven pounds, fourteen ounces. He was born in Allegheny Hospital at 6:30 in the evening, December 29, 1950. His fingers and toes were intact and quite long. He was a plump baby. My grandfather, high on Dago Red, tramped into the maternity ward just minutes after Robby was delivered. John French was delighted with the new baby. Called him Red. A big fat little red nigger.

December always been a bad month for me. One the worst days of my life was in December. It's still one the worst days in my life even after all this other mess. Jail. Running. The whole bit. Been waiting to tell you this a long time. Ain't no reason to hold it back no longer. We into this telling-the-truth thing so mize well tell it all. I'm still shamed, but there it is. You know that TV of youall's got stolen from Mommy's. Well, I did it. Was me

and Henry took youall's TV that time and set the house up to look like a robbery. We did it. Took my own brother's TV. Couldn't hardly look you in the face for a long time after we done it. Was pretty sure youall never knowed it was me, but I felt real bad round youns anyway. No way I was gon confess though. Too shamed. A junkie stealing from his own family. See. Used to bullshit myself. Say I ain't like them other guys. They stone junkies, they hooked. Do anything for a hit. But me, I'm Robby. I'm cool. I be believing that shit, too. Fooling myself. You got to bullshit yourself when you falling. Got to do it to live wit yourself. See but where it's at is you be doing any goddam thing for dope. You hooked and that's all's to it. You a stone junkie just like the rest.

Always wondered if you knew I took it.

Mom was suspicious. She knew more than we did then. About the dope. The seriousness of it. Money disappearing from her purse when nobody in the house but the two of you. Finding a syringe on the third floor. Stuff like that she hadn't talked about to us yet. So your stealing the TV was a possibility that came up. But to me it was just one of many. One of the things that could have happened along with a whole lot of other possibilities we sat around talking about. An unlikely possibility as far as I was concerned. Nobody wanted to believe it was you. Mom tried to tell us how it *could* be but in my mind you weren't the one. Haven't thought about it much since then. Except as one of those things that make me worry about Mom living in the house alone. One of those things making Homewood dangerous, tearing it down.

I'm glad I'm finally getting to tell you. I never could get it out. Didn't want you to think I'd steal from my own brother. Specially since all youall done to help me out. You and Judy and the kids. Stealing youall's TV. Don't make no sense, does it? But if we gon get the story down mize well get it all down.

It was a while ago. Do you remember the year?

Nineteen seventy-one was Greens. When we robbed Greens and got in big trouble so it had to be the year before that, 1970. That's when it had to be. Youns was home for Christmas. Mommy and them was having a big party. A reunion kinda cause all the family was together. Everybody home for the first time in a long time. Tish in from Detroit. David back from Philly. Youns in town. My birthday, too. Party spozed to celebrate my birthday too, since it came right along in there after Christmas. Maybe that's why I was feeling so bad. Knowing I had a birthday coming and knowing at the same time how fucked up I was.

Sat in a chair all day. I was hooked for the first time. Good and hooked. Didn't know how low you could feel till that day. Cold and snowing outside. And I got the stone miseries inside. Couldn't move. Weak and sick. Henry too. He was wit me in the house feeling bad as I was. We was two desperate dudes. Didn't have no money and that Jones down on us.

Mommy kept asking, What's wrong with you two? She was on my case all day. What ails you, Robby? Got to be about three o'clock. She come in

the room again: You better get up and get some decent clothes on. We're leaving for Geral's soon. See cause it was the day of the big Christmas party. Geral had baked a cake for me. Everybody was together and they'd be singing Happy Birthday Robby and do. The whole bit an I'm spozed to be guest of honor and can't even move out the chair. Here I go again disappointing everybody. Everybody be at Geral's looking for me and Geral had a cake and everything. Where's Robby? He's home dying cause he can't get no dope.

Feeling real sorry for myself but I'm hating me too. Wrapped up in a blanket like some damned Indin. Shivering and wondering how the hell Ima go out in this cold and hustle up some money. Wind be howling. Snow pitching a bitch. There we is. Stuck in the house. Two pitiful junkies. Scheming how we gon get over. Some sorry-assed dudes. But it's comical in a way too, when you look back. To get well we need to get money. And no way we gon get money less we go outside and get sicker than we already is. Mom peeking in the room, getting on my case. Get up out that chair, boy. What are you waiting for? We're leaving in two minutes.

So I says, Go on. I ain't ready. Youns go on. I'll catch up with youns at Geral's.

Mommy standing in the doorway. She can't say too much, cause youns is home and you ain't hip to what's happening. C'mon now. We can't wait any longer for you. Please get up. Geral baked a cake for you. Everybody's looking forward to seeing you.

Seem like she stands there a hour begging me to come. She ain't mad no more. She's begging. Just about ready to cry. Youall in the other room. You can hear what she's saying but you can't see her eyes and they tearing me up. Her eyes begging me to get out the chair and it's tearing me up to see her hurting so bad, but ain't nothing I can do. Jones sitting on my chest and ain't no getup in me.

Youns go head, Mommy. I'll be over in a little while. Be there to blow them candles out and cut the cake.

She knew better. Knew if I didn't come right then, chances was I wasn't coming at all. She knew but wasn't nothing she could do. Guess I knew I was lying too. Nothing in my mind cept copping that dope. Yeah, Mom. Be there to light them candles. I'm grinning but she ain't smiling back. She knows I'm in trouble, deep trouble. I can see her today standing in the doorway begging me to come with youns.

But it ain't meant to be. Me and Henry thought we come up with a idea. Henry's old man had some pistols. We was gon steal em and hock em. Take the money and score. Then we be better. Wouldn't be no big thing to hustle some money, get the guns outa hock. Sneak the pistols back in Henry's house, everything be alright. Wouldn't even exactly be stealing from his old man. Like we just borrowing the pistols till we score and take care business. Henry's old man wouldn't even know his pistols missing. Slick. Sick as we was, thinking we slick.

A hundred times. Mom musta poked her head in the room a hundred times.

What's wrong with you?

Like a drum beating in my head. What's wrong with you? But the other thing is stronger. The dope talking to me louder. It says get you some. It says you ain't never gon get better less you cop.

We waited long as we could but it didn't turn no better outside. Still snowing. Wind shaking the whole house. How we gon walk to Henry's and steal them pistols? Henry live way up on the hill. And the way up Tokay then you still got a long way to go over into the projects. Can't make it. No way we gon climb Tokay. So then what? Everybody's left for Geral's. Then I remembers the TV youns brought. A little portable Sony black-and-white, right? You and Judy sleeping in Mom's room and she has her TV already in there, so the Sony ain't unpacked. Saw it sitting with youall's suitcases over by the dresser. On top the dresser in a box. Remembered it and soon's I did I knew we had to have it. Sick as I was that TV had to go. Wouldn't really be stealing. Borrow it instead of borrowing the pistols. Pawn it. Get straight. Steal some money and buy it back. Just borrowing youall's TV.

Won't take me and Henry no time to rob something and buy back the TV. We stone thieves. Just had to get well first so we could operate. So we took youns TV and set the house up to look like a robbery.

I'm remembering the day. Wondering why it had slipped completely from my mind. I feel like a stranger. Yet as Robby talks, my memory confirms details of his recollection. I admit, yes. I was there. That's the way it was. But *where* was I? Who was I? How did I miss so much?

His confessions make me uncomfortable. Instead of concentrating on what he's revealing, I'm pushed into considering all the things I could be confessing, should be confessing but haven't and probably won't ever. I feel hypocritical. Why should I allow my brother to repose a confidence in me when it's beyond my power to reciprocate? Shouldn't I confess that first? My embarrassment, my uneasiness, the clinical, analytic coldness settling over me when I catch on to what's about to happen.

I have a lot to hide. Places inside myself where truth hurts, where incriminating secrets are hidden, places I avoid, or deny most of the time. Pulling one piece of that debris to the surface, airing it in the light of day doesn't accomplish much, doesn't clarify the rest of what's buried down there. What I feel when I delve deeply into myself is chaos. Chaos and contradiction. So how up front can I get? I'm moved by Robby's secrets. The heart I have is breaking. But what that heart is and where it is I can't say. I can't depend on it, so he shouldn't. Part of me goes out to him. Heartbreak is the sound of ice cracking. Deep. Layers and layers muffling the sound.

I listen but I can't trust myself. I have no desire to tell everything about myself so I resist his attempt to be up front with me. The chaos at my core must be in his. His confession pushes me to think of all the stuff I should lay on him. And that scares the shit out of me. I don't like to feel dirty, but that's how I feel when people try to come clean with me.

Very complicated and very simple too. The fact is I don't believe in clean. What I know best is myself and, knowing what I know about myself, clean seems impossible. A dream. One of those better selves occasionally in the driver's seat but nothing more. Nothing to be depended upon. A self no more or less in control than the countless other selves who each, for a time, seem to be running things.

Chaos is what he's addressing. What his candor, his frankness, his confession echo against. Chaos and time and circumstances and the old news, the bad news that we still walk in circles, each of us trapped in his own little world. Behind bars. Locked in our cells.

But my heart can break, does break listening to my brother's pain. I just remember differently. Different parts of the incident he's describing come back. Strange thing is my recollections return through the door he opened. My memories needed his. Maybe the fact that we recall different things is crucial. Maybe they are foreground and background, propping each other up. He holds on to this or that scrap of the past and I listen to what he's saved and it's not mine, not what I saw or heard or felt. The pressure's on me then. If his version of the past is real, then what's mine? Where does it fit? As he stitches his memories together they bridge a vast emptiness. The time lost enveloping us all. Everything. And hearing him talk, listening to him try to make something of the nothing, challenges me. My sense of the emptiness playing around his words, any words, is intensified. Words are nothing and everything. If I don't speak I have no past. Except the nothing, the emptiness. My brother's memories are not mine, so I have to break into the silence with my own version of the past. My words. My whistling in the dark. His story freeing me, because it forces me to tell my own.

I'm sorry you took so long to forgive yourself. I forgave you a long time ago, in advance for a sin I didn't even know you'd committed. You lied to me. You stole from me. I'm in prison now listening because we committed those sins against each other countless times. I want your forgiveness. Talking about debts you owe me makes me awkward, uneasy. We remember different things. They set us apart. They bring us together searching for what is lost, for the meaning of difference, of distance.

For instance, the Sony TV. It was a present from Mort, Judy's dad. When we told him about the break-in and robbery at Mom's house, he bought us another Sony. Later we discovered the stolen TV was covered by our homeowner's policy even though we'd lost it in Pittsburgh. A claim was filed and eventually we collected around a hundred bucks. Not enough to buy a new Sony but a good portion of the purchase price. Seemed a lark when the check arrived. Pennies from heaven. One hundred dollars free and clear since we already had the new TV Mort had surprised us with. About a year later one of us, Judy or I, was telling the story of the robbery and how well we came out of it. Not until that very moment when I caught a glimpse of Mort's face out of the corner of my eye did I realize what we'd done. Judy remembers urging me to send Mort

that insurance check and she probably did, but I have no recollection of an argument. In my mind there had never been an issue. Why shouldn't we keep the money? But when I saw the look of surprise and hurt flash across Mort's face, I knew the insurance check should have gone directly to him. He's a generous man and probably would have refused to accept it, but we'd taken advantage of his generosity by not offering the check as soon as we received it. Clearly the money belonged to him. Unasked, he'd replaced the lost TV. I had treated him like an institution, one of those faceless corporate entities like the gas company or IRS. By then, by the time I saw the surprise in Mort's face and understood how selfishly, thoughtlessly, even corruptly I'd behaved, it was too late. Offering Mort a hundred dollars at that point would have been insulting. Anything I could think of saying sounded hopelessly lame, inept. I'd fucked up. I'd injured someone who'd been nothing but kind and generous to me. Not intentionally, consciously, but that only made the whole business worse in a way because I'd failed him instinctively. The failure was a measure of who I was. What I'd unthinkingly done revealed something about my relationship to Mort I'm sure he'd rather not have discovered. No way I could take my action back, make it up. It reflected a truth about who I was.

That memory pops right up. Compromising, ugly. Ironically, it's also about stealing from a relative. Not to buy dope, but to feed a habit just as self-destructive. The habit of taking good fortune for granted, the habit of blind self-absorption that allows us to believe the world owes us everything and we are not responsible for giving anything in return. Spoiled children. The good coming our way taken as our due. No strings attached.

Lots of other recollections were triggered as Robby spoke of that winter and the lost TV. The shock of walking into a burgled house. How it makes you feel unclean. How quickly you lose the sense of privacy and security a house, any place you call home, is supposed to provide. It's a form of rape. Forced entry, violation, brutal hands defiling what's personal, and precious. The aftershock of seeing your possessions strewn about, broken. Fear gnawing at you because what you thought was safe isn't safe at all. The worst has happened and can happen again. Your sanctuary has been destroyed. Any time you walk in your door you may be greeted by the same scene. Or worse. You may stumble upon the thieves themselves. The symbolic rape of your dwelling place enacted on your actual body. Real screams. Real blood. A knife at your throat. A stranger's weight bearing down.

Mom put it in different words but she was as shaken as I was when we walked into her house after Geral's party. Given what I know now, she must have been even more profoundly disturbed than I imagined. A double bind. Bad enough to be ripped off by anonymous thieves. How much worse if the thief is your son? For Mom the robbery was proof Robby was gone. Somebody else walking round in his skin. Mom was wounded in ways I hadn't begun to guess at. At the root of her pain were your troubles, the troubles stealing you away from her, from all of us. The troubles thick in the air as that snow you are remembering, the troubles falling on your head and mine, troubles I refused to see. . . .

Snowing and the hawk kicking my ass but I got to have it. TV's in a box under my arm and me and Henry walking down Bennett to Homewood Avenue. Need thirty dollars. Thirty dollars buy us two spoons. Looking for One-Arm Ralph, the fence. Looking for him or that big white Cadillac he drives.

Wind blowing snow all up in my face. Thought I's bout to die out there. Nobody on the avenue. Even the junkies and dealers inside today. Wouldn't put no dog out in weather like that. So cold my teeth is chattering, talking to me. No feeling in my hands but I got to hold on to that TV. Henry took it for a little while so's I could put both my hands in my pockets. Henry lookin bad as I'm feeling. Thought I was gon puke. But it's too goddamn cold to puke.

Nobody in sight. Shit and double shit's what I'm thinking. They got to be somewhere. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week somebody doing business. Finally we seen One-Arm Ralph come out the Hi Hat.

This TV, man, Lemme hold thirty dollars on it.

Ralph ain't goin for it. Twenty-five the best he say he can do. Twenty-five don't do us no good. It's fifteen each for a spoon. One spoon ain't enough. We begging the dude now. We got to have it, man. Got to get well. We good for the money. Need thirty dollars for two hits. You get your money back.

Too cold to be standing around arguing. The dude go in his pocket and give us the thirty. He been knowing us. He know we good for it. I'm telling him don't sell the TV right away. Hold it till tomorrow we have his money. He say, You don't come back tonight you blow it. Ralph a hard mother-fucker and don't want him changing his mind again about the thirty so I say, We'll have the money tonight. Hold the TV till tonight, you get your money.

Now all we got to do is find Goose. Goose always be hanging on the set. Ain't nobody else dealing, Goose be out there for his people. Goose an alright dude, but even Goose ain't out in the street on no day like this. I know the cat stays over the barbershop on Homewood Avenue. Across from Murphy's five-and-ten. I goes round to the side entrance, the alleyway tween Homewood and Kelly. That's how you get to his place. Goose lets me in and I cop. For some reason I turn up the alley and go toward Kelly instead of back to Homewood the way I came in. Don't know why I did it. Being slick. Being scared. Henry's waiting on the avenue for me so I go round the long way just in case somebody pinned him. I can check out the scene before I come back up the avenue. That's probably what I'm thinking. But soon's I turn the corner of Kelly, Bam. Up pops the devil.

Up against the wall, Squirrel.

It's Simon and Garfunkel, two jive undercover cops. We call them that, you dig. Lemme tell you what kind of undercover cops these niggers was. Both of em wearing Big Apple hats and jackets like people be wearing then but they both got on police shoes. Police brogans you could spot a mile away. But they think they slick. They disguised, see. Apple hats and hippy-dip jackets. Everybody knew them chumps was cops. Ride around

in a big Continental. Going for bad. Everybody hated them cause everybody knew they in the dope business. They bust a junkie, take his shit and sell it. One them had a cousin. Biggest dealer on the Hill. You know where he getting half his dope. Be selling again what Simon and Garfunkel stole from junkies. Some rotten dudes. Liked to beat on people too. Wasn't bad enough they robbing people. They whipped heads too.

Soon's I turn the corner they got me. Bams me up against the wall. They so lame they think they got Squirrel. Think I'm Squirrel and they gon make a big bust. We got you, Squirrel. They happy, see, cause Squirrel dealing heavy then. Thought they caught them a whole shopping bag of dope.

Wearing my double-breasted pea coat. Used to be sharp but it's raggedy now. Ain't worth shit in cold weather like that. Pockets got holes and the dope dropped down in the lining so they don't find nothing the first time they search me. Can tell they mad. Thought they into something big and don't find shit. Looking at each other like, What the fuck's going on here? We big-time undercover supercops. This ain't spozed to be happening to us. They roughing me up too. Pulling my clothes off and shit. Hands all down in my pockets again. It's freezing and I'm shivering but these fools don't give a fuck. Rip my goddamn pea coat off me. Shaking it. Tearing it up. Find the two packs of dope inside the lining this time. Ain't what they wanted but they pissed off now. Take what they can get now.

What's this, Squirrel? Got your ass now.

Slinging me down the alley. I'm stone sick now. Begging these cats for mercy. Youall got me. You got your bust. Lemme snort some the dope, man. Little bit out each bag. You still got your bust. I'm dying. Little taste fore you lock me up.

Rotten motherfuckers ain't going for it. They see I'm sick as a dog. They know what's happening. Cold as it is, the sweat pouring out me. It's sweat but it's like ice. Like knives cutting me. They ain't give back my coat. Snowing on me and I'm shaking and sweating and sick. They can see all this. They know what's happening but ain't no mercy in these dudes. Henry's cross the street watching them bust me. Tears in his eyes. Ain't nothing he can do. The street's empty. Henry's bout froze too. Watching them sling my ass in their Continental. Never forget how Henry looked that day. All alone on the avenue. Tears froze in his eyes. Seeing him like that was a sad thing. Last thing I saw was him standing there across Homewood Avenue before they slammed me up in the car. Like I was in two places. That's me standing there in the snow. That's me so sick and cold I'm crying in the empty street and ain't a damn thing I can do about it.

By the time they get me down to the Police Station, down to No. 5 in East Liberty, I ain't no more good, sure nuff. Puking. Begging them punks not to bust me. Just bout out my mind. Must have been a pitiful sight. Then's when Henry went to Geral's house and scratched on the window and called David out on the porch. That's when youall found out I was in trouble and had to come down and get me. Right in the middle of the party and everything. Henry's sick too and he been walking round Homewood

in the cold didn't know what to do. But he's my man. He got to Geral's so youall could come down and help me. Shamed to go in so he scratched on the window to get Dave on the porch.

Party's over and youns go to Mommy's and on top everything else find the house broke in and the TV gone. All the stuff's going through my mind. I'm on the bottom now. Low as you can go. Had me in a cell and I was lying cross the cot staring at the ceiling. Bars all round. Up cross the ceiling too. Like in a cage in the zoo. Miserable as I could be. All the shit staring me in the face. You're a dope fiend. You stole your brother's TV. You're hurting Mommy again. Hurting everybody. You're sick. You're nothing. Looking up at the bars on the ceiling and wondering if I could tie my belt there. Stick my neck in it. I wanted to be dead.

Tied my belt to the ceiling. Then this guard checking on me he starts to hollering.

What you doing? Hey, Joe. This guy's trying to commit suicide.

They take my clothes. Leave me nothing but my shorts. I'm lying there shivering in my underwear and that's the end. In a cage naked like some goddamn animal. Shaking like a leaf. Thinking maybe I can beat my head against the bars or maybe jump down off the bed head first on the concrete and bust my brains open. Dead already. Nothing already. Low as I can go.

Must have passed out or gone to sleep or something, cause it gets blurry round in here. Don't remember much but they gave back my clothes and took me Downtown and there was a arraignment next morning.

Mommy told me later, one the cops advised her not to pay my bond. Said the best thing for him be to stay in jail awhile. Let him see how it is inside. Scare im. But I be steady beggin. Please, please get me out here. Youns got soft-hearted. Got the money together and paid the bond.

What would have happened if you left me to rot in there till my hearing? Damned if I know. I probably woulda went crazy, for one thing. I do know that. Know I was sick and scared and cried like a baby for Mommy and them to get me out. Don't think it really do no good letting them keep me in there. I mean the jail's a terrible place. You can get everything in jail you get in the street. No different. Cept in jail it's more dangerous cause you got a whole bunch of crazies locked up in one little space. Worse than the street. Less you got buddies in there they tear you up. Got to learn to survive quick. Cause jail be the stone jungle. Call prison the House of Knowledge cause you learns how to be a sure nuff criminal. Come in lame you leave knowing all kinds of evil shit. You learn quick or they eats you up. That's where it's at. So you leave a person in there, chances are they gets worse. Or gets wasted.

But Mom has that soft heart anyway and she ain't leaving her baby boy in no miserable jail. Right or wrong, she ain't leaving me in no place like that. Daddy been talking to Simon and Garfunkel. Daddy's hip, see. He been out there in the street all his life and he knows what's to it. Knows those guys and knows how rotten they is. Ain't no big thing they catch one pitiful little junkie holding two spoons. They wants dealers. They wants to

look good Downtown. They wants to bust dealers and cop beaucoup dope so's they can steal it and get rich. Daddy makes a deal with them rats. Says if they drop the charges he'll make me set up Goose. Finger Goose and then stay off Homewood Avenue. Daddy says I'll do that so they let me go.

No way Ima squeal on Goose but I said okay, it's a deal. Soon's I was loose I warned Goose. Pretend like I'm trying to set him up so the cops get off my ass but Goose see me coming know the cops is watching. Helped him, really. Like a lookout. Them dumb motherfuckers got tired playing me. Simon got greedy. Somebody set him up. He got busted for drugs. Still see Garfunkel riding round in his Continental but they took him off the avenue. Too dangerous. Everybody hated them guys.

My lowest day. Didn't know till then I was strung out. That's the first time I was hooked. Started shooting up with Squirrel and Bugs Johnson when Squirrel be coming over to Mom's sometimes. Get up in the morning, go up to the third floor, and shoot up. They was like my teachers. Bugs goes way back. He started with Uncle Carl. Been shooting ever since. Dude's old now. Call him King of the Junkies, he been round so long. Bugs seen it all. You know junkies don't hardly be getting old. Have their day then they gone. Don't see em no more. They in jail or dead. Junkie just don't have no long life. Fast life but your average dopehead ain't round long. Bugs different. He was a pal of Uncle Carl's back in the fifties. Shot up together way back then. Now here he is wit Squirrel and me, still doing this thing. Everybody knows Bugs. He the King.

Let me shoot up wit em but they wouldn't let me go out in the street and hustle wit em. Said I was too young. Too green.

Learning from the King, see. That's how I started the heavy stuff. Me and Squirrel and Bugs first thing in the morning when I got out of bed. Mom was gone to work. They getting themselves ready to hit the street. Make that money. Just like a job. Wasn't no time before I was out there, too. On my own learning to get money for dope. Me and my little mob. We was ready. Didn't take us no time fore we was gangsters. Gon be the next Bugs Johnson. Gon make it to the top.

Don't take long. One day you the King. Next day dope got you and it's the King. You ain't nothing. You lying there naked bout to die and it don't take but a minute. You fall and you gone in a minute. That's the life. That's how it is. And I was out there. I know. Now they got me jammed up in the slammer. That's the way it is. But nobody could tell me nothing then. Hard head. You know. Got to find out for myself. Nobody could tell me nothing. Just out of high school and my life's over and I didn't even know it. Too dumb. Too hardheaded. I was gon do it my way. Youns was square. Youns didn't know nothing. Me, I was gon make mine from the curb. Hammer that rock till I was a supergangster. Be the one dealing the shit. Be the one running the junkies. That's all I knew. Street smarts. Stop being a chump. Forget that nickel-dime hoodlum bag. Be a star. Rise to the top.

You know where that got me. You heard that story. Here I sit today behind that story. Nobody to blame but my ownself. I know that now. But things was fucked up in the streets. You could fall in them streets, Brother.

Low. Them streets could snatch you bald-headed and turn you around and wring you inside out. Streets was a bitch. Wake up some mornings and you think you in hell. Think you died and went straight to hell. I know cause I been there. Be days I wished I was dead. Be days worser than that.

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QUESTIONS FOR A SECOND READING

1. Wideman frequently interrupts this narrative to talk about the problems he is having as a writer. He says, for example, "The hardest habit to break, since it was the habit of a lifetime, would be listening to myself listen to him. That habit would destroy any chance of seeing my brother on his terms; and seeing him in his terms, learning his terms, seemed the whole point of learning his story" (p. 618). What might Wideman mean by this — listening to himself listen? As you reread "Our Time," note the sections in which Wideman speaks to you directly as a writer. What is he saying? Where and how are you surprised by what he says?

Wideman calls attention to the problems he faces. How does he try to solve them? Are you sympathetic? Do the solutions work, so far as you are concerned?

2. Wideman says that his mother had a remarkable capacity for "[trying] on the other person's point of view" (p. 612). Wideman tries on another point of view himself, speaking to us in the voice of his brother Robby. As you reread this selection, note the passages spoken in Robby's voice and try to infer Robby's point of view from them. If you look at the differences between John and Robby as evidenced by the ways they use language to understand and represent the world, what do you notice?
3. Wideman talks about three ways he could start Robby's story: with Garth's death, with the house in Shadyside, and with the day of Robby's birth. What difference would it make in each case if he chose one and not the others? What's the point of presenting all three?

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ASSIGNMENTS FOR WRITING

1. At several points in the essay, Wideman discusses his position as a writer, telling Robby's story, and he describes the problems he faces in writing this piece (or in "reading" the text of his brother's life). You could read this selection, in other words, as an essay about reading and writing.

Why do you think Wideman talks about these problems here? Why not keep quiet and hope that no one notices? Choose three or four passages in which Wideman refers directly or indirectly to his work as a writer, and write an essay defining the problems Wideman faces and explaining why you

think he raises them as he does. Finally, what might this have to do with your work as a writer — or as a student in this writing class?

2. Wideman tells Robby's story in this excerpt, but he also tells the story of his neighborhood, Homewood; of his mother; and of his grandfather John French. Write an essay retelling one of these stories and explaining what it might have to do with Robby and John's.
3. "Our Time" is a family history, but it is also a meditation on the problems of writing family histories — or, more generally, the problems of writing about the "real" world. There are sections in "Our Time" where Wideman speaks directly about the problems he faces as a writer. And the unusual features in the prose stand as examples of how he tried to solve these problems — at certain points Wideman writes as an essayist, at others like a storyteller; at certain points he switches voices; the piece breaks up into sections, it doesn't move from introduction to conclusion. Think of these as part of Wideman's method, as his way of working on the problems of writing as practical problems, where he is trying to figure out how to do justice to his brother and his story.

As you prepare to write this assignment, read back through the selection to think about it as a way of doing one's work, as a project, as a way of writing. What are the selection's key features? What is its shape or design? How does Wideman, the writer, do what he does? And you might ask: What would it take to learn to write like this? How is this writing related to the writing taught in school? Where and how might it serve you as a student?

Once you have developed a sense of Wideman's method, write a Wideman-like piece of your own, one that has the rhythm and the moves, the shape and the design of "Our Time." As far as subject matter is concerned, let Wideman's text stand as an invitation (inviting you to write about family and neighborhood), but don't feel compelled to follow his lead. You can write about anything you want. The key is to follow the essay as an example of a way of writing — moving slowly, turning this way and that, combining stories and reflection, working outside of a rigid structure of thesis and proof.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Various selections in this textbook can be said to be "experimental" in their use of nonfiction prose. These are essays that don't do what essays are supposed to do. They break the rules. They surprise. The writers work differently from most writers. They imagine a different project (or they imagine their project differently).

Although any number of the selections in *Ways of Reading* might be read alongside "Our Time," here are some that have seemed interesting to our students: Gloria Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (p. 22); Susan Griffin, "Our Secret" (p. 351); and Claudia Rankine, "Citizen" (p. 501).

Choose one selection to compare with John Edgar Wideman's and write an essay in which you both explain and explore the projects represented by the two pieces of writing. How do they address a reader's expectations? How do they manipulate the genre? How do they reimagine the features we take for granted in the genre of the essay — sentences and paragraphs; introductions and conclusions; argument, narrative, and exposition? And what is to be gained (or what is at stake) in writing this way? (Would you, for example, argue that these forms of writing should be taught in college?) You should assume that you are writing for someone who is a sophisticated reader but who is not familiar with these particular essays. You will need, that is, to be careful in choosing and presenting examples.

2. Both John Edgar Wideman's "Our Time" and Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities" (p. 38) call attention to the difficulties of representing and understanding the experience of those whom we call "African Americans" — the difficulty of telling their story, of getting it right, of recovering experience from the representations of others.

Write an essay in which you represent these two texts as examples of writers working on a problem that has a particular urgency for all Americans, not just black Americans. How might you name this problem? What do you find compelling in each of these approaches to the problem? And what might this problem have to do with you — as a writer, a thinker, a person, and a citizen?

3. Both John Edgar Wideman in "Our Time" and Ta-Nehisi Coates in "Between the World and Me" (p. 242) can be seen as writing to understand the places in which they grew up and the ideas about the world and family that circulated in those places at those times. Wideman takes on this work by writing *about* his brother (sometimes in the voice of his brother), while Coates takes on this work by writing *to* his son. Write an essay in which you consider the following questions: What ideas, arguments, or approaches do Wideman and Coates have in common, despite more than thirty years between the publication of their books? What do their commonalities suggest to you? How does Wideman's writing about his brother make his work different from Coates's writing, in which Coates is talking to his son? How might Coates's perspective address Wideman's concerns about getting to the truth of his brother's story?

Assignment

SEQUENCES

Working with Assignment Sequences

Ten assignment sequences follow. (For instructors, additional sequences are located in *Resources for Teaching Ways of Reading*.) These assignment sequences are different from the single writing assignments at the end of each essay. The single writing assignments are designed to give you a way back into the works you have read. They define the way you, the reader, can work on an essay by writing about it—testing its assumptions, probing its examples, applying its way of thinking to a new setting or to new material. A single assignment might ask you to read what Joy Castro has to say about education and then, as a writer, to use Castro's terms and methods to analyze a moment from your own schooling. The single assignments are designed to demonstrate how you might work on an essay, particularly an essay that is long or complex, and they are designed to show how pieces that might seem daunting are open, manageable, and managed best by writing.

Although some of the particular questions are drawn from the single writing assignments, the assignment sequences have a similar function, but with one important difference: instead of writing one paper, or working on one or two selections from the book, you will be writing several essays and reading several selections. Your work will be sequential as well as cumulative. The work you do on Castro, for example, will give you a way of beginning with Mary Louise Pratt or W. E. B. Du Bois. It will give you an angle of vision. You won't be a newcomer to such discussions. Your previous reading and writing will make the new essay rich with association. Passages or examples will jump out, as if magnetized, and demand your attention. And by reading these essays in context, you will see each writer as

a single voice in a larger discussion. Neither Castro, nor Pratt, nor Du Bois, after all, has had the last word on the subject of education. It is not as though, by working on one of the essays, you have wrapped the subject up, ready to be put on the shelf.

The sequences are designed, then, so that you will be working not only on essays but on a subject, like education (or history, or culture, or autobiography), a subject that can be examined, probed, and understood through the various frames provided by your reading. Each essay becomes a way of seeing a problem or a subject; it becomes a tool for thinking, an example of how a mind might work, a way of using language to make a subject rich and alive. In the assignment sequences, your reading is not random. Each sequence provides a set of readings that can be pulled together into a single project.

The sequences allow you to participate in an extended academic project, one with several texts and several weeks' worth of writing. You are not just adding one essay to another (Du Bois + Pratt = ?) but trying out an approach to a subject by revising it, looking at new examples, hearing what someone else has to say, and beginning again to take a position of your own. Projects like these take time. It is not at all uncommon for professional writers to devote weeks or even months to a single essay, and the essay they write marks not the end of their thinking on the subject, but only one stage. Similarly, when readers are working on a project, the pieces they read accumulate on their desks and in their minds and become part of an extended conversation with several speakers, each voice offering a point of view on a subject, a new set of examples, or a new way of talking that resonates with echoes from earlier reading.

A student may read many books, take several courses, write many papers; ideally each experience becomes part of something larger, an education. The work of understanding, in other words, requires time and repeated effort. The power that comes from understanding cannot be acquired quickly — by reading one essay or working for a few hours. A student, finally, is a person who choreographs such experiences, not someone who passes one test only to move on to another. And the assignment sequences are designed to reproduce, although in a condensed period of time, the rhythm and texture of academic life. They invite you to try on its characteristic ways of seeing, thinking, and writing. The work you do in one week will not be lost when it has bearing on the work you do in the next. If an essay by Susan Griffin has value for you, it is not because you proved to a teacher that you read it, but because you have put it to work and made it a part of your vocabulary as a student.

WORKING WITH A SEQUENCE

Here is what you can expect as you work with a sequence. You begin by working with a single reading. You will need to read each piece twice, the second time with the "Questions for a Second Reading" and the assignment sequence in mind. Before rereading the selection, in other words, you should read through the assignments to get a sense of where you will be headed. And you should read the questions at the end of each selection. (You can use those questions to help frame questions of your own.) The purpose of all these questions, in a sense, is to prepare the text to speak — to bring it to life and insist that it respond to your

attention, answer your questions. If you think of the authors as people you can talk to, if you think of their pages as occasions for dialogue (as places where you get to ask questions and insist on responses), if you prepare your return to those pages in these ways, you are opening up the essays or stories (not closing them down or finishing them off) and creating a scene where you get to step forward as a performer.

While each sequence moves from selection to selection in *Ways of Reading*, the most significant movement in the sequence is defined by the essays you write. Your essays provide the other major texts for the course. In fact, when we teach these sequences, we seldom have any discussion of the assigned readings before our students have had a chance to write. When we talk as a group about Atul Gawande's "Slow Ideas," for example, we begin by reproducing one or two student essays, handing them out to the class, and using them as the basis for discussion. We want to start, in other words, by looking at ways of reading Gawande's article—not at his article alone.

The essays you write for each assignment in a sequence might be thought of as works-in-progress. Your instructor will tell you the degree to which each essay should be finished—that is, the degree to which it should be revised and copy-edited and worked into a finished performance. In our classes, most writing assignments go through at least one revision. After we have had a chance to see a draft (or after a draft has been seen by others in the class), and after we have had some discussion of sample student essays, we ask students to read the assigned text one more time and to rework their essays to bring their work one step further—not necessarily to finish the essays (as though there would be nothing else to say) but to finish up this stage in their work and to feel their achievement in a way a writer simply cannot the first time through. Each assignment, then, really functions as two assignments in the schedule for the course. As a consequence, we don't "cover" as many essays in a semester as students might in another class. But coverage is not our goal. In a sense, we are teaching our students how to read slowly and closely, to return to a text rather than set it aside, to take the time to reread and rewrite and to reflect on what these activities entail. Some of these sequences, then, contain more readings or more writing assignments than you can address in a quarter or semester. Different courses work at different paces. It is important, however, to preserve time for rereading and rewriting. The sequences were written with the assumption that they would be revised to meet the needs of teachers, students, and programs. As you look at your syllabus, you may find, then, that reading or writing assignments have been changed, added, or dropped. There are alternative selections and assignments at the end of most of these sequences so that the sequences can be customized. Your instructor may wish to replace some of the selections and assignments in the sequence with alternatives.

You will be writing papers that can be thought of as single essays. But you will also be working on a project, something bigger than its individual parts. From the perspective of the project, each piece you write is part of a larger body of work that evolves over the term. You might think of each sequence as a revision exercise, where the revision looks forward to what comes next as well as backward to what you have done. This form of revision asks you to do more than

complete a single paper; it invites you to re-see a subject or reimagine what you might say about it from a new point of view. You should feel free, then, to draw on your earlier essays when you work on one of the later assignments. There is every reason for you to reuse ideas, phrases, sentences, even paragraphs as your work builds from one week to the next. The advantage of works-in-progress is that you are not starting over completely every time you sit down to write. You've been over this territory before. You've developed some expertise in your subject. There is a body of work behind you.

Most of the sequences bring together several essays from the text and ask you to imagine them as an extended conversation, one with several speakers. The assignments are designed to give you a voice in the conversation as well, to allow you to speak in turn and to take your place in the company of other writers. This is the final purpose of the assignment sequence: after several weeks' work on the essays and on the subject that draws them together, you will begin to establish your own point of view. You will develop a position from which you can speak with authority, drawing strength from the work you have done as well as from your familiarity with the people who surround you.

This book brings together some of the most powerful voices of our culture. They speak in a manner that asks for response. The assignments at the end of each selection and, with a wider range of reference, the assignment sequences here at the end of the book demonstrate that there is no reason for a student, in such company, to remain silent.

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SEQUENCE ONE

Exploring Identity, Exploring the Self

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Edward Said

Judith Butler

Susan Griffin

ALTERNATIVES:

John Edgar Wideman

Ruth Behar

Roxane Gay

This sequence invites you to explore some complicated questions about identity—questions about who we are as human beings, about our relationships to others, and about the narratives we tell about ourselves and others. The sequence is particularly challenging because it asks you to be self-reflexive and to think critically about representations of race, sexuality, gender, and class. These categories are ways of characterizing identity, but as with all categories, the characterizations they produce are partial, flawed, and incomplete. Each of these authors asks you to think about different aspects of identity, and the questions in this sequence ask you to draw from the readings and from your own experience, at times, to explore the question: who are we?

In the first two assignments, you'll get the chance to think about two ways identity might be said to be expressed or enacted: narrative and representation. We tell stories about who we are. Inevitably, we also tell stories about others. In those narratives, we find representations. You might think of the sequence as moving from those specific examples of narrative and representation to more

philosophical and political questions about what it means to be human, and how the concept of the human is employed to make some identities seem more legitimate or compelling than others. To work with this sequence, you have to be willing to imagine other ways of being outside whatever your own ways of being might be; you have to be able to look closely at the texts at hand to raise questions about what they reveal and how their assertions might be connected to your own life. The final assignment asks you to respond to Susan Griffin's assertion that we are part of a complex web of connections. If Griffin is right that "all the lives that surround us are in us," this would suggest that we might have some responsibility to think about lives other than our own as a way of thinking about ourselves.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Narrative and Identity

KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

Consider this passage from "Racial Identities":

Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories. In our society (though not, perhaps, in the England of Addison and Steele) being witty does not in this way suggest the life script of "the wit." And that is why what I called the personal dimensions of identity work differently from the collective ones.

This is not just a point about modern Westerners: cross-culturally it matters to people that their lives have a certain narrative unity; they want to be able to tell a story of their lives that makes sense. The story — my story — should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling that story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectivities is, for most of us, important. (pp. 53–54)

Your project in this assignment is to consider the terms, the stages, the conclusions, and the consequences of Kwame Anthony Appiah's argument in his essay "Racial Identities." If, as a mental exercise (or because you are convinced), you accept Appiah's notion that "collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories," how might you tell a story that places yourself in relation to the available scripts, to the life stories available to a person like you — a person of your culture (or collectivity), a person of your age, now, in the twenty-first century?

You are not required to write in the genre of the memoir (as though you were writing a chapter of your autobiography), but many find that an inviting way to begin. What a reader wants is a view of you and your world, not in the pen-pal sense of what you look like or what you prefer in music, but with the goal of understanding something more general, something about people like you,

something about what it is that shapes and defines a person or an identity in this place and at this point in time. In Appiah's terms, your writing will negotiate the competing demands of a life and a "script," of the personal and the collective, of individual freedom and the politics of identity.

We are trying to avoid the word "essay" in describing this project, since that word carries certain generic restrictions. Our advice is for you to begin not with a generalization but with some specific scene or scenes. Begin with a story (or stories) rather than with an argument. If people are speaking, you may choose to let them speak as characters speak in fiction. You may write in the first person if you find it helpful to do so.

ASSIGNMENT 2

Identity and Representation

EDWARD SAID

The final chapter of Edward Said's *After the Last Sky* ends with this:

I would like to think, though, that such a book not only tells the reader about us, but in some way also reads the reader. I would like to think that we are not just the people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers.

Read back through Said's essay "States" (p. 523) by looking at the photos with this reversal in mind—looking in order to see yourself as the one who is being looked at, as the one observed. How are you positioned by the photographer, Jean Mohr? How are you positioned by the person in the scene, always acknowledging your presence? What are you being told?

Once you have read through the photographs, reread the essay with a similar question in mind. This time, however, look for evidence of how Said positions you, defines you, invents you as a presence in the scene.

ASSIGNMENT 3

The Concept of Human

JUDITH BUTLER

The opening lines of Judith Butler's essay might be understood as an invitation to participate with her in one of the traditions of philosophy. She writes:

What makes for a livable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people in various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers,

then that is a conclusion I am happy to embrace. It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not. (p. 182)

Write an essay that takes up this invitation — and that takes it up in specific reference to what Butler has offered in “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy.” You will need, then, to take some time to represent her essay — both what it says and what it does. The “Questions for a Second Reading” (p. 200) should be helpful in preparing for this. Imagine an audience of smart people, people who may even know something about Butler, but who have not read this essay. You have read it, and you want to give them a sense of how and why you find it interesting and important. You’ll also need to take time to address her questions in your own terms: What makes for a livable world? What constitutes the human? Don’t slight this part of your essay. Give yourself as many pages as you gave Butler. You should, however, make it clear that you are writing in response to what you have read. You’ll want to indicate, both directly and indirectly, how your thoughts are shaped by, indebted to, or responding to hers.

ASSIGNMENT 4

The Politics of Dehumanization

JUDITH BUTLER, EDWARD SAID

In his essay “States,” Edward Said theorizes about the notion of exile in relation to Palestinian identity, offering a study of exile and dislocation through his analysis of photographs taken by Jean Mohr. Consider the following passage:

We turn ourselves into objects not for sale, but for scrutiny. People ask us, as if looking into an exhibit case, “What is it you Palestinians want?” — as if we can put our demands into a single neat phrase. All of us speak of *awdah*, “return,” but do we mean that literally, or do we mean “we must restore ourselves to ourselves”? (p. 542)

When Said talks about being looked at as though in an exhibit case, we might understand him as being concerned with the problem of dehumanization. After all, to be in an exhibit case is to be captured, trapped, even dead. We might understand Judith Butler as also wrestling with the problem of dehumanization. In her essay “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” she writes: “I would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts

as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life?" (p. 182).

Write an essay in which you consider the ways Said and Butler might be said to be speaking with each other. How might the condition of exile be like the condition of being *beside oneself*? What kind of connections—whether you see them as productive or problematic, or both at once—can be made between the ways Said talks about nation, identity, and home, and the ways Butler talks about gender and sexuality? What passages from each seem to have the other in mind? How does each struggle with reference, with pronouns like “we” and “our”?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Interconnectedness and Identity

SUSAN GRIFFIN

In “Our Secret,” Susan Griffin argues that we—all of us, especially all of us who have read her essay—are part of a complex web of connections. At one point she says,

Who are we? The question is not simple. What we call the self is part of a larger matrix of relationship and society. Had we been born to a different family, in a different time, to a different world, we would not be the same. All the lives that surround us are in us. (p. 381)

At another point she asks, “Is there any one of us who can count ourselves outside the circle circumscribed by our common past?” She speaks of a “field,”

like a field of gravity that is created by the movements of many bodies. Each life is influenced and it in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is a cause is also an effect. Childhood experience is just one element in the determining field. (p. 356)

One way of thinking about this concept of the self and of interrelatedness, at least under Griffin’s guidance, is to work on the connections that she implies and asserts. As you reread the selection, look for powerful and surprising juxtapositions, fragments that stand together in interesting and suggestive ways. Think about the arguments represented by the blank space between those sections. (And look for Griffin’s written statements about “relatedness.”)

Look for connections that seem important to the text (and to you) and representative of Griffin’s thinking (and yours). Then, write an essay in which you use these examples to think through your understanding of Griffin’s claims for this “larger matrix,” the “determining field,” or our “common past.”

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

A Writer's Identity, A Writer's Position

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

At several points in his essay "Our Time" (p. 603), John Edgar Wideman discusses his position as a writer, telling Robby's story, and he describes the problems he faces in writing this piece (or in "reading" the text of his brother's life). You could read this selection, in other words, as an essay about reading and writing.

Why do you think Wideman talks about these problems here? Why not keep quiet and hope no one notices? Choose three or four passages in which Wideman refers directly or indirectly to his work as a writer, and write an essay defining the problems Wideman faces and explaining why you think he raises them as he does. Finally, what might this have to do with your work as a writer—or as a student in this writing class?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Representing Others

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

In his essay "Our Time," John Edgar Wideman worries over the problems of representation, of telling his brother's story. He speaks directly to the fundamental problem writers face when they try to represent the lives of others: "I'd slip unaware out of his story and into one of my own. I'd be following him, an obedient shadow, then a cloud would blot the sun and I'd be gone, unchained, a dark form still skulking behind him but no longer in tow" (p. 618). Wideman goes on to say:

The hardest habit to break . . . would be listening to myself listen to him. That habit would destroy any chance of seeing my brother on his terms; and seeing him in his terms, learning his terms, seemed the whole point of learning his story. . . . I had to teach myself to listen. Start fresh, clear the pipes, resist too facile an identification, tame the urge to take off with Robby's story and make it my own. (p. 618)

Write an essay about writing and representation, about the real world and the world of texts, with Wideman as your primary point of reference. How does he

understand representation as a problem for writers and readers? How is that understanding represented (or enacted) in his work?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The Reflexive Self

RUTH BEHAR

Early on in the "The Vulnerable Observer," Ruth Behar discusses the anxieties many academic writers feel about acknowledging their personal investment in or relation to the subjects about which they are writing. Behar cites Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind* as a text that deals with these anxieties extensively. Jamison asks some very difficult questions:

Will my work now be seen by my colleagues as somehow biased because of my illness? . . . If, for example, I am attending a scientific meeting and ask a question, or challenge a speaker, will my question be treated as though it is coming from someone who has studied and treated mood disorders for many years, or will it instead be seen as a highly subjective, idiosyncratic view of someone who has a personal ax to grind? (Jamison as cited in Behar, p. 114)

Think about a moment in your life when you worried that your impartiality or investment in an issue might have affected how you were interpreting a situation or how your interpretation of a situation might be read and interpreted by others. Write an essay about that experience, the limits of objectivity, and the potential value and usefulness of subjective experience. Engage with passages from Behar and perhaps also from Jamison to help you explore these issues and the personal example you are using. Though this assignment asks you to identify an experience similar to those of Behar and Jamison, be mindful of the differences between your experiences and theirs. You might even discuss how those differences shape the meaning and significance of the narratives that construct your life and theirs.

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Gender and Identity

ROXANE GAY

It is easy to read Gay's essay—she delights us with humor and speaks conversationally about a subject that seems accessible to many of us. But, of course, we can also learn a great deal from taking Gay's essay seriously. Not necessarily

taking seriously every single instruction, but taking seriously the ways the essay invites us to think about gender—about how gender is set up, what it encourages and discourages us from doing.

Write an essay in which you consider Gay's essay in terms of arguments about gender more broadly. What are the implications about gender based on these instructions? What does Gay want us to see about women, femininity, men, and masculinity? Quote specific passages and be sure to explain what interpretative moves you have to make as a reader to get from your supporting quotations to Gay's arguments (or questions) about how gender works on us, with us, and against us.

SEQUENCE TWO

The Aims of Education

W. E. B. Du Bois

Joy Castro

Mary Louise Pratt

Atul Gawande

ALTERNATIVE:

Susan Griffin

You have been in school for many years, long enough for your experiences in the classroom to seem natural, inevitable. The purpose of this sequence is to invite you to step outside a world you may have begun to take for granted, to look at the ways you have been taught and at the unspoken assumptions behind your education. The five assignments that follow bring together four essays that discuss how people (and particularly students) become trapped inside habits of thought. These habits of thought become invisible (or seem natural) because of the ways our schools work or because of the ways we have traditionally learned to use language when we speak, read, or write.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Agents of Change

W. E. B. DU BOIS

W. E. B. Du Bois writes to reform American education. There are many other writers in *Ways of Reading* who write as agents of change, although with different starting points, different concerns, and different agendas: Joy Castro, in “Hungry” and “On Becoming Educated” (pp. 207, 210); Mary Louise Pratt, in “Arts of the Contact Zone” (p. 454); and Atul Gawande, in “Slow Ideas” (p. 325), are just a few examples.

Write an essay in which you put one of these essays (or another from *Ways of Reading*) into conversation with the chapter from *The Souls of Black Folk*. Where and how do they speak to the same issues? Where and how do they differ in their arguments and in their approach? How are they different as pieces of writing — different in style and in intent? You will need to represent carefully the positions of each. You will need to think about differences as well as similarities. And you should think about how and why the differences might be attributed to history, to race, or to gender.

ASSIGNMENT 2

The Contact Zone

MARY LOUISE PRATT

The idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy. (p. 461)

— MARY LOUISE PRATT, "Arts of the Contact Zone"

Citing Benedict Anderson and what he calls "imagined communities," Mary Louise Pratt argues that our idea of community is "strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize." Against this utopian vision of community, Pratt argues that we need to develop ways of understanding (even noticing) social and intellectual spaces that are not homogeneous, unified; we need to develop ways of understanding and valuing difference. And, for Pratt, the argument extends to schooling. She asks:

What is the place of unsolicited oppositional discourse, parody, resistance, critique in the imagined classroom community? Are teachers supposed to feel that their teaching has been most successful when they have eliminated such things and unified the social world, probably in their own image? Who wins when we do that? Who loses? (p. 464)

"Such questions," she says, "may be hypothetical, because in the United States in the 1990s, many teachers find themselves less and less able to do that even if they want to."

"In the United States in the 1990s." "The imagined classroom community." From your experience, what scenes might be used to represent schooling in the 1990s and beyond? How are they usually imagined (idealized, represented, interpreted, valued)? What are the implications of Pratt's argument?

Write an essay in which you use Pratt's terms to examine a representative scene from your own experience with schools and schooling. What examples, stories, or images best represent your experience? How might they be interpreted as examples of community? as examples of "contact zones"? As you prepare your essay, you will want to set the scene as carefully as you can, so that someone who

was not there can see it fully. Think about how someone who has not read Pratt might interpret the scene. And think through the various ways *you* might interpret your example. And you should also think about your position in an argument about school as a contact zone. What do you (or people like you) stand to gain or lose when you adopt Pratt's point of view?

ASSIGNMENT 3

The Pedagogical Arts of the Contact Zone

MARY LOUISE PRATT

Meanwhile, our job in the Americas course remains to figure out how to make that crossroads the best site for learning that it can be. We are looking for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone. These will include, we are sure, exercises in storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. (p. 466)

— MARY LOUISE PRATT, "Arts of the Contact Zone"

Mary Louise Pratt writes generally about culture and history, but also about reading and writing and teaching and learning, about the "literate" and "pedagogical" arts of this place she calls the contact zone. Think about the class you are in—its position in the curriculum, in the institution. Think about its official goals (and its unofficial goals). Think about the positions represented by the students, the teacher. Think about how to think about the class, in Pratt's terms, as a contact zone.

And think about the unusual exercises represented by her list: "storytelling," "experiments in transculturation," "critique," "parody," "unseemly comparisons," moving into and out of "rhetorics of authenticity"—these are some of them. Take one of these suggested exercises, explain what you take it to mean, and then go on to discuss how it might be put into practice in a writing class. What would students do? to what end? How would their work be evaluated? What place would the exercise have in the larger sequence of assignments over the term, quarter, or semester? In your terms, and from your point of view, what might you learn from such an exercise?

Or you could think of the question this way: What comments would a teacher make on one of the papers you have written so far in order that its revision might

stand as one of these exercises? How would the revision be different from what you are used to doing?

Write an essay in which you present and discuss an exercise designed to serve the writing class as a contact zone.

ASSIGNMENT 4

Learning and Teaching

ATUL GAWANDE

Gawande's essay can be thought of as a teaching tool. Gawande has things for us to learn about innovation and change in medical practices. He also has things for us to learn about the teaching and learning that made innovation and successful change possible in life-and-death situations. This assignment invites you to write about Gawande's arguments for best practices in teaching for innovation and change and to situate those practices in the conditions for learning that you might call necessary or at least helpful to the success of the teaching.

When you reread "Slow Ideas," mark the moments when Gawande seems to be drawing lessons about best teaching practices from his case examples. It might be that the teaching practices are specific to the cases, or it might be that he's making larger claims about what's effective for teaching others. You'll have to decide how to situate his claims for best teaching practices, but you should at the least situate them in the conditions that seem to be necessary for learning to occur. What is it, in other words, about learners and their situations that has to be present for the best teaching practices to take hold?

Write an essay in which you make a case for what you think Gawande is saying about the best teaching practices for supporting others to innovate and change. Work closely from Gawande's case examples and situate your thinking in the conditions for learning that seem to be necessary for the best practices to work, to take hold.

ASSIGNMENT 5

Gender, Race, and Education

W. E. B. DU BOIS

There is an interesting and characteristic sentence toward the end of the chapter "Of the Training of Black Men" that nicely illustrates a difficulty Du Bois has in writing women into his account of education. He says:

Comparing them as a class [black students educated in the South] with my fellow students in New England and in Europe, I cannot hesitate in saying that nowhere have I met men and women with a

broader spirit of helpfulness, with deeper devotion to their life-work, or with more consecrated determination to succeed in the face of bitter difficulties than among Negro college-bred men. (p. 280)

The “men and women” at the opening of the sentence become “college-bred men” by its close. Go back and reread these three chapters, looking carefully to see how and where women are represented. Where are Du Bois’s sympathies? What does he take for granted? What does he struggle to acknowledge? (It might also be useful to do some research for this assignment — to find out, for example, about the educational opportunities available to women and, in particular, to black women at the turn of the century, or to read other pieces by Du Bois on the status of women. For the latter, the collection of essays and articles in the Library of America edition, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings*, is particularly useful.)

Write an essay in which you represent and discuss the ways Du Bois figures women into his account of the issues confronting the education of black Americans in the South at the turn of the century. Where and how are they present? Where and how are they absent? And how would you account for their position in these texts?

A word of caution: it should be clear that it is not enough to claim in absolute terms that Du Bois is sexist or that he is a product of his time. It serves no good purpose to reduce Du Bois to a stick figure (and it would be wrong); texts are all in one way or another products of their times, and a student would have to do a considerable amount of work to be able to speak responsibly about what Americans thought or said in 1903. Your work here is to locate in Du Bois’s writing passages that will allow you to think about his efforts to write about gender, race, and education.

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The Task of Attention

SUSAN GRIFFIN

I am looking now at the etching called *Poverty*, made in 1897. Near the center, calling my attention, a woman holds her head in her hands. (p. 360)

— SUSAN GRIFFIN, “Our Secret”

This is one of the many moments when Susan Griffin speaks to us as though in the midst of her work. The point of this assignment is to think about that work — what it is, how she does it, and what it might have to do with schools and schooling. She is, after all, doing much of the traditional work of scholars — going to the archive, studying old materials, traveling and interviewing subjects, learning and writing history.

And yet this is not the kind of prose you would expect to find in a textbook for a history course. Even if the project is not what we usually think of as a research

project, Griffin is a careful researcher. Griffin knows what she is doing. Go back to look again (this time with a writer's eye) at both the features of Griffin's prose and the way she characterizes her work as a scholar, gathering and studying her materials.

Write an essay in which you present an account of *how* Griffin does her work. You should use her words and examples from the text, but you should also feel that it is your job to explain what you present and to comment on it from the point of view of a student. As you reread, look to those sections where Griffin seems to be speaking to her readers about her work—about how she reads and how she writes, about how she gathers her materials and how she studies them. What is she doing? What is at stake in adopting such methods? How might they be taught? Where in the curriculum might (should?) such lessons be featured?

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SEQUENCE THREE

The Arts of the Contact Zone

Mary Louise Pratt

Gloria Anzaldúa

John Edgar Wideman

Edward Said

ALTERNATIVE:

Ruth Behar

Jennine Capó Crucet

This sequence allows you to work closely with the argument of Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone," not so much through summary (repeating the argument) as through extension (working under its influence, applying its terms and protocols). In particular, you are asked to try your hand at those ways of reading and writing Pratt defines as part of the "literate arts of the contact zone," ways of reading and writing that have not historically been taught or valued in American schools.

Pratt is one of the country's most influential cultural critics. In "Arts of the Contact Zone," she makes the argument that our usual ways of reading and writing assume identification—that is, we learn to read and write the texts that express our own position and point of view. As a result, texts that reproduce different ways of thinking, texts that allude to different cultural systems, seem flawed, wrong, or inscrutable. As a counterposition, Pratt asks us to imagine scenes of reading, writing, teaching, and learning as "contact zones," places of contact between people who can't or don't or won't necessarily identify with one another.

In the first assignment, you are asked to search for or produce a document to exemplify the arts of the contact zone, working in library archives, searching the streets, surfing the Internet, or writing an "autoethnography." This is a big job, and

probably new to most students; it is a project you will want to come back to and revise. The remaining assignments outline a project in which you examine other selections from *Ways of Reading* that exemplify or present moments of cultural contact.

ASSIGNMENT 1

The Literate Arts of the Contact Zone

MARY LOUISE PRATT

Here, briefly, are two descriptions of the writing one might find or expect in the contact zone:

Autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression—these are some of the literate arts of the contact zone. Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning—these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone. They all live among us today in the transnationalized metropolis of the United States and are becoming more widely visible, more pressing, and, like Guaman Poma's text, more decipherable to those who once would have ignored them in defense of a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality. (p. 461)

We are looking for the pedagogical arts of the contact zone. These will include, we are sure, exercises in storytelling and in identifying with the ideas, interests, histories, and attitudes of others; experiments in transculturation and collaborative work and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms); the redemption of the oral; ways for people to engage with suppressed aspects of history (including their own histories), ways to move *into and out of* rhetorics of authenticity; ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the all-important concept of *cultural mediation*. (p. 466)

Here are two ways of working on Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the contact zone. Choose one.

1. One way of working with Pratt's essay, of extending its project, would be to conduct your own local inventory of writing from the contact zone. You might do this on your own or in teams, with others from your class. You will want to gather several similar documents, your "archive," before you make a final selection. Think about how to make that choice. What makes one document stand out as representative? Here are two ways you might organize your search:
 - a. You could look for historical documents. A local historical society might have documents written by Native Americans ("Indians") to the white

settlers. There may be documents written by slaves to masters or to northern whites explaining their experience. There may be documents written by women (suffragists, for example) trying to negotiate for public positions or rights. There may be documents from any of a number of racial or ethnic groups — Hispanic, Jewish, Irish, Italian, Polish, Swedish — trying to explain their positions to the mainstream culture. There may, perhaps at union halls, be documents written by workers to owners. Your own sense of the heritage of your area should direct your search.

- b. Or you could look at contemporary documents in the print that is around you, texts that you might otherwise overlook. Pratt refers to one of the characteristic genres of the Hispanic community, the *"testimonio."* You could look for songs, testimonies, manifestos, statements by groups on campus, stories, autobiographies, interviews, letters to the editor, web pages. You could look at the writing of any marginalized group, particularly writing intended, at least in part, to represent the experience of outsiders to the dominant culture (or to be in dialogue with that culture or to respond to that culture). These documents, if we follow Pratt's example, would encompass the work of young children or students, including college students.

Once you have completed your inventory, choose a document you would like to work with and write an essay that presents it carefully and in detail (perhaps in even greater detail than Pratt's presentation of the *New Chronicle*). You will, in other words, need to set the scene, summarize, explain, and work block quotations into your essay. You might imagine that you are presenting this to someone who would not have seen it and would not know how to read it, at least not as an example of the literate arts of the contact zone.

2. Another way of extending the project of Pratt's essay would be to write your autoethnography. It should not be too hard to locate a setting or context in which you are the "other"—the one who speaks from outside rather than inside the dominant discourse. Pratt says that the position of the outsider is marked not only by differences of language and ways of thinking and speaking but also by differences in power, authority, status. In a sense, she argues, the only way those in power can understand you is in *their* terms. These are terms you will need to use to tell your story, but your goal is to describe your position in ways that "engage with representations others have made of [you]" without giving in or giving up or disappearing in their already formed sense of who you are.

This is an interesting challenge. One of the things that will make the writing difficult is that the autoethnographic or transcultural text calls upon skills not usually valued in American classrooms: bilingualism, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression, storytelling, unseemly comparisons of high and low cultural forms—these are some of the terms Pratt offers. These do not fit easily with the traditional genres of the writing class (essay, term paper, summary, report) or its traditional values (unity, consistency, sincerity, clarity, correctness, decorum).

You will probably need to take this essay (or whatever it should be called) through several drafts. (In fact, you might revise this essay after you have completed assignments 2 and 3.) It might be best to begin as Pratt's student, using her description as a preliminary guide. Once you get a sense of your own project, you may find that you have terms or examples to add to her list of the literate arts of the contact zone.

ASSIGNMENT 2

Borderlands

MARY LOUISE PRATT, GLORIA ANZALDÚA

In "Arts of the Contact Zone" (p. 454), Mary Louise Pratt talks about the "autoethnographic" text, "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them," and about "transculturation," the "processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from the materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture."

Write an essay in which you present a reading of Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (p. 22) as an example of an autoethnographic and/or transcultural text. You should imagine that you are writing to someone who is not familiar with either Pratt's argument or Anzaldúa's thinking. Part of your work, then, is to present Anzaldúa's text to readers who don't have it in front of them. You have the example of Pratt's reading of Guaman Poma's *New Chronicle and Good Government*. And you have her discussion of the literate arts of the contact zone. Think about how Anzaldúa's text might be similarly read and about how her text does and doesn't fit Pratt's description. Your goal should be to add an example to Pratt's discussion and to qualify it, to alter or reframe what she has said now that you have had a chance to look at an additional example.

ASSIGNMENT 3

Counterparts

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

Here, from "Arts of the Contact Zone," is Mary Louise Pratt on the autoethnographic text:

Guaman Poma's *New Chronicle* is an instance of what I have proposed to call an *autoethnographic* text, by which I mean a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them. Thus if ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic

texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with those texts. . . . They involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. . . . Such texts often constitute a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture. It is interesting to think, for example, of American slave autobiography in its autoethnographic dimensions, which in some respects distinguish it from Euramerican autobiographical tradition. (pp. 456–57)

John Edgar Wideman's "Our Time" (p. 603) could serve as a twentieth-century counterpart to the *New Chronicle*. Reread it with "Arts of the Contact Zone" in mind. Write an essay that presents "Our Time" as an example of an autoethnographic and/or transcultural text. You should imagine that you are working to put Pratt's ideas to the test (*does it do what she says such texts must do?*), but also add what you have to say concerning this text as a literate effort to be present in the context of difference.

ASSIGNMENT 4

A Dialectic of Self and Other

MARY LOUISE PRATT, EDWARD SAID

In "States," an account of Palestinian life written by a Palestinian in exile, Edward Said says,

All cultures spin out a dialectic of self and other, the subject "I" who is native, authentic, at home, and the object "it" or "you," who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there. From this dialectic comes the series of heroes and monsters, founding fathers and barbarians, prized masterpieces and despised opponents that express a culture from its deepest sense of national self-identity to its refined patriotism, and finally to its coarse jingoism, xenophobia, and exclusivist bias. (p. 547)

This is as true of the Palestinians as it is of the Israelis — although, he adds, "For Palestinian culture, the odd thing is that its own identity is more frequently than not perceived as 'other'" (p. 547).

In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt argues that our idea of community is "strongly utopian, embodying values like equality, fraternity, liberty, which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realize" (p. 462). Against this utopian vision of community, Pratt argues that we need to develop ways of understanding (noticing or creating) social and intellectual spaces that are not

homogeneous or unified—contact zones. She argues that we need to develop ways of understanding and valuing difference.

There are similar goals and objects to these projects. Reread Pratt's essay with Said's "States" in mind. As Pratt defines what she refers to as the "literate arts of the contact zone," can you find points of reference in Said's text? Said's thinking always attends to the importance and the conditions of writing, including his own. There are ways that "States" could be imagined as both autoethnographic and transcultural. How might his work allow you to understand the literate arts of the contact zone in practice? How might his work allow you to understand the problems and possibilities of such writing beyond what Pratt has imagined, presented, and predicted?

ASSIGNMENT 5

On Culture

MARY LOUISE PRATT, GLORIA ANZALDÚA,

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN, EDWARD SAID

In some ways, the slipperiest of the key words in Mary Louise Pratt's essay "Arts of the Contact Zone" is "culture." At one point Pratt says,

If one thinks of cultures, or literatures, as discrete, coherently structured, monolingual edifices, Guaman Poma's text, and indeed any autoethnographic work, appears anomalous or chaotic—as it apparently did to the European scholars Pietschmann spoke to in 1912. If one does not think of cultures this way, then Guaman Poma's text is simply heterogeneous, as the Andean region was itself and remains today. Such a text is heterogeneous on the reception end as well as the production end: it will read very differently to people in different positions in the contact zone. (pp. 460–61)

If one thinks of cultures as "coherently structured, monolingual edifices," the text appears one way; if one thinks otherwise, the text is "simply heterogeneous." What might it mean to make this shift in the way one thinks of culture? Can you do it—that is, can you read the *New Chronicle* (or its excerpts) from both points of view? Better yet—what about your own culture and its key texts? Can you, for example, think of a group that you participate in as a "community"? Where and how does it represent itself to others? Where and how does it do this in writing? What are its "literate arts"?

The assignments in this sequence are an exercise in reading texts as heterogeneous, as contact zones. As a way of reflecting on your work in this sequence, write an essay in which you explain the work you have been doing to someone not in the course, someone who is interested in reading, writing, and learning, but who has not read Mary Louise Pratt, Gloria Anzaldúa, John Edgar Wideman, or Edward Said.

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The Essay as a Contact Zone

RUTH BEHAR

Ruth Behar spends a significant amount of time throughout "The Vulnerable Observer" discussing the genres she has explored and the one she has eventually settled on — the essay. As Behar explains, "Unconsciously at first, but later with more direction, I chose the essay as a genre through which to *attempt* (the original meaning of *essai* or *essay*) the dialectic between connection and otherness that is at the center of all forms of historical and cultural representation" (p. 120). Behar goes on to explain that the essay is "an amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other, [which] has been the genre of choice for radical feminists and cultural critics pursuing thick description" (p. 120).

Behar's discussion of the etymology of the word *essay*, emerging from the French infinitive *essayer*, meaning "to attempt" or "to try," might be unfamiliar to you and different from how you have conceptualized the "essay." Write an essay that explores this denotative definition of the word *essay*, in which you attempt to understand the significance and potential uses of that definition for writers like Behar and for the "radical feminists and cultural critics" Behar associates herself with. Why might the form, conceived of in such a way, be of use to such writers? What does it allow for? In your essay, also consider how Behar's employment of that understanding of the genre is reflected in her text, both in terms of the type of argument and structure she utilizes and in terms of the stylistic features she relies on in her writing.

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Narrating the Contact Zone

JENNINE CAPÓ CRUCET

Most readers might experience Crucet's "Going Cowboy" (p. 258) as narrative, as a personal story about a personal experience she had in exploring a new place for the first time. But the piece is, of course, about much more than that. In fact, we might also read the essay as making several important arguments (some more explicit than others) about issues of gender, race, politics, and history. For this essay, we want you to decide what you think is Crucet's most important argument in this piece. Write an essay in which you identify (using specific moments in the text) Crucet's most poignant or essential argument. What is she trying to persuade us about? How does she enact that persuasion? Why might Crucet have chosen the narrative essay to communicate this argument as opposed to a more conventional and linear persuasive essay? What about Crucet's storytelling style and craft make the argument powerful, visible, and interesting? Or, in the case where you think the argument is more implicit, how might you help a reader to see its power in the essay?

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SEQUENCE FOUR

Autobiographical Explorations

Edward Said

Susan Griffin

Gloria Bird

Ruth Behar

Aubrey Hirsch

ALTERNATIVES:

John Edgar Wideman

Alison Bechdel

Joy Castro

Jenny Price

Autobiographical writing has been a regular feature of writing courses since the nineteenth century. There are a variety of reasons for the prevalence of autobiography, not the least of which is the pleasure students take in thinking about and writing about their lives and their world. There is also a long tradition of published autobiographical writing, particularly in the United States. The title of this sequence puts a particular spin on that tradition, since it points to a more specialized use of autobiography, phrased here as "exploration." What is suggested by the title is a use of writing (and the example of one's experience, including intellectual experience) to investigate, question, explore, inquire. Often the genre is not used for these purposes at all. Autobiographical writing is often used for purposes of display or self-promotion, or to further (rather than question) an argument (about success, about how to live a good or proper or fulfilling life).

There are two threads to this sequence. The first invites you to experiment with the genre of “autobiographical exploration.” The second foregrounds the relationship between your work and the work of others, asking you to think about how and why and where you are prepared to write autobiographically (prepared not only by the lessons you’ve learned in school but also by the culture and the way it invites you to tell — and live — the story of your life). And, if you are working inside a conventional field, a predictable way of writing, the sequence asks where and how you might make your mark or assert your position — your identity as a person (a character in a life story) and as a writer (someone working with the conventions of life-writing).

The alternative assignments that follow provide similar assignments but with different readings. They can be substituted for or added to the assignments in this sequence.

ASSIGNMENT 1

A Photographic Essay

EDWARD SAID

Edward Said, in the introduction to *After the Last Sky*, says of his method in “States”:

Its style and method — the interplay of text and photos, the mixture of genres, modes, styles — do not tell a consecutive story, nor do they constitute a political essay. Since the main features of our present existence are dispossession, dispersion, and yet also a kind of power incommensurate with our stateless exile, I believe that essentially unconventional, hybrid, and fragmentary forms of expression should be used to represent us. What I have quite consciously designed, then, is an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction. p. 6)

And later:

The multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. Stateless, dispossessed, de-centered, we are frequently unable either to speak the “truth” of our experience or to make it heard. We do not usually control the images that represent us; we have been confined to spaces designed to reduce or stunt us; and we have often been distorted by pressures and powers that have been too much for us. An additional problem is that our language, Arabic, is unfamiliar in the West and belongs to a tradition and civilization usually both misunderstood and maligned. Everything we write about ourselves, therefore, is an interpretive translation — of our language, our experience, our senses of self and others. p. 6)

Reread "States" (p. 523), paying particular attention to the relationship of text and photograph, and paying attention to form. What is the order of the writing in this essay? (We will call it an essay for lack of a better term.) How might you diagram or explain its organization? By what principle(s) is it ordered and arranged? The essay shifts genres—memoir, history, argument. It is, as Said comments, "hybrid." What surprises are there? or disappointments? How might you describe the writer's strategy as he works on his audience, on readers? And, finally, do you find Said's explanation sufficient or useful—does the experience of exile produce its own inevitable style of report and representation?

For this assignment, compose a similar project, a Said-like reading of a set of photos. These can be photos prepared for the occasion (by you or a colleague); they could also be photos already available. Whatever their source, they should represent people and places, a history and/or geography that you know well, that you know to be complex and contradictory, and that you know will not be easily or readily understood by others, both the group for whom you will be writing (most usefully the members of your class) and readers more generally. You must begin with a sense that the photos cannot speak for themselves; you must speak for them.

In preparation, you should reread closely to come to a careful understanding of Said's project. The first and second "Questions for a Second Reading" (pp. 560–61) should be useful for this.

ASSIGNMENT 2

The Matrix

SUSAN GRIFFIN

At several points in her essay "Our Secret," Susan Griffin argues that we—all of us—are part of a complex web of connections. We live in history, and history is determining. At one point she says:

Who are we? The question is not simple. What we call the self is part of a larger matrix of relationship and society. Had we been born to a different family, in a different time, to a different world, we would not be the same. All the lives that surround us are in us. (p. 381)

At another point she asks, "Is there any one of us who can count ourselves outside the circle circumscribed by our common past?" She speaks of a "field"

like a field of gravity that is created by the movements of many bodies. Each life is influenced and it in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is a cause is also an effect. Childhood experience is just one element in the determining field. (p. 356)

One way of thinking about this concept of the self (and of interrelatedness), at least under Griffin's guidance, is to work on the connections that she implies and asserts. As you reread the selection, look for powerful and surprising juxtapositions,

fragments that stand together in interesting and suggestive ways. Think about the arguments represented by the blank spaces on the page or the jumps from section to section. (And look for Griffin's written statements about relatedness.) Look for connections that seem important to the text (and to you) and seem to be representative of Griffin's thinking (and useful to yours).

Write an essay in which you use these examples to think through the ways Griffin answers the question she raises: Who are we?

ASSIGNMENT 3

Theories of Autobiography

GLORIA BIRD

Many of the essays in this collection make use of or raise questions about autobiography as a way of thinking about social justice, political questions, and cultural representation. For example, we might understand writers like John Edgar Wideman, Joy Castro, Susan Griffin, Edward Said, Aubrey Hirsch, Ruth Behar, Alison Bechdel, and, of course, Gloria Bird, as addressing questions about autobiography.

Choose two or three of these writers and begin to develop your own theory of autobiography, using specific passages from each writer's work to interrogate, develop, and support your own claims about autobiography. Your essay could consider questions such as the following: What does it mean to do the work of autobiography? How do you understand the relationship between personal experience and intellectual ideas? What work can autobiography do for the writer and/or readers? What does your own experience writing about your own life tell you about these questions? And, finally, what are the difficulties and rewards of writing autobiographical essays?

ASSIGNMENT 4

Uses of Vulnerability

RUTH BEHAR

Though Behar's essay can be read as arguing for the incorporation of the personal into academic writing, she also argues that such work is only valuable if deep connections between the personal and the subject at hand can be made. This argument can be seen clearly in the following passage:

To assert that one is a "white middle-class woman" or a "black gay man" or a "working-class Latina" within one's study of Shakespeare or Santería is only interesting if one is able to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study. That doesn't require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most

important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied. (p. 116)

Continuing, Behar explains, “Vulnerability doesn’t mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn’t otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake” (p. 116).

Write an essay in which you reflect on and react to Behar’s arguments about when and how the personal should be deployed in academic writing. As you reflect on these issues, look more closely at the examples Behar includes in her own text and consider whether she always follows her own advice. In writing your essay, question whether you agree with her argument. Would you revise it in any way? What other examples in Behar’s text might showcase other reasons for the demonstration of vulnerability and the use of the personal in academic writing? What other examples or rhetorical situations can you imagine that might do so?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Talking to Children

AUBREY HIRSCH

Hirsch devotes some discussion in “Fragments” (p. 387) to thinking about her two sons. While she struggles to know exactly how to talk to them, she offers a list of things she wants them to know. She proceeds to give her sons advice: she would want them “to ‘deal with’ rape culture the way one ‘deals with’ a cockroach problem.”

For this essay, we invite you to address a young child you imagine as your own (whether or not you have children or intend to). Imagine this child as belonging to specific identity categories and compose a list of advice on the subject of rape culture and sexual violence. What does Hirsch say to her sons? What might you say to your sons, your daughters, your genderqueer or transgender children, etc.? What do you imagine they will need to hear, know, and understand? Finally, in a short reflective piece, provide some comments on your list of advice. What does the list suggest to you about this subject? Given the list you have come up with, what (in a larger cultural sense) needs to be done?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Old Habits

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

John Edgar Wideman frequently interrupts the narrative in “Our Time” to talk about the problems he is having as a writer. He says, for example, “The hardest habit to break, since it was the habit of a lifetime, would be listening to myself

listen to him. That habit would destroy any chance of seeing my brother on his terms; and seeing him in his terms, learning his terms, seemed the whole point of learning his story" (p. 618).

Wideman gives you the sense of a writer who is aware from the inside, while writing, of the problems inherent in the personal narrative. This genre always shades and deflects; it is always partial and biased; in its very attempts to be complete, to understand totally, it reduces its subject in ways that are unacceptable. And so you can see Wideman's efforts to overcome these problems—he writes in Robby's voice; he starts his story three different times, first with Garth, later with the neighborhood, hoping that a variety of perspectives will overcome the limits inherent in each; he stops and speaks to us not as the storyteller but as the writer, thinking about what he is doing and not doing.

Let Wideman's essay provide a kind of writing lesson. It highlights problems; it suggests alternatives. Using Wideman, then, as your writing teacher, write a family history of your own. Yours will most likely be shorter than Wideman's, but let its writing be the occasion for you also to work on a personal narrative as a writing problem, an interesting problem that forces a writer to think about the limits of representation and point of view (about who gets to speak and in whose terms, about who sums things up and what is left out in this accounting).

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Graphic Autobiography

ALISON BECHDEL

Alison Bechdel writes, "Of course the point at which I began to write the story is not the same as the point at which the story begins" (p. 75). We might read this statement as a commentary on the work of composing autobiography or memoir. She remarks later, "Another difficulty is the fact that the story of my mother and me is unfolding even as I write it" (p. 78).

Consider Bechdel's comments about writing this book and about herself. What does she seem to be suggesting about the difficulties of writing autobiographical work? How would it be different if her work were composed of only words, or if it were a more conventional memoir of mother and daughter? How does her chosen form of graphic memoir enable and limit what she is able to do in writing about herself and her family?

Think of an autobiographical narrative you are familiar with, perhaps in literature or film. You might want to think of a story that involves a mother and daughter, like Bechdel's does. Write an essay in which you discuss the differences between this familiar narrative and Bechdel's work. In your discussion, you'll want to provide particular sets of frames or clusters from Bechdel's work and specific moments in the narrative as examples. What is the relationship between the two autobiographical approaches? What does Bechdel's graphic work do that the other narrative does not do? What can you say about Bechdel's approach from looking at it alongside this other example?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

A Single Life, a Multiple World

JOY CASTRO, SUSAN GRIFFIN

We might read Joy Castro's "Hungry" and "On Becoming Educated" (pp. 207, 210) and Susan Griffin's "Our Secret" (p. 351) as containing elements of autobiography. Each writer relies on stories from her own life to demonstrate the relationship between one individual life and the larger cultural and political implications. Susan Griffin writes, "To a certain kind of mind, what is hidden away ceases to exist" (p. 374). As readers, we are struck by the ways this statement (and so many of Griffin's statements) pertains both to her own life story and to the larger historical narrative of the Holocaust.

Reread both Castro and Griffin, looking for sentences and phrases that seem to work on two levels (the personal and the political/cultural). Which sentences or phrases suggest to you that they are both about the writer's life *and* about all of our lives, about the world? How can you tell?

Write an essay in which you illuminate, through the work of these two writers, the relationship between one life and what happens in the world at large. How do these writers help us understand ourselves as individuals and also as parts of larger systems, cultures, or worlds?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Who We Are and *Where* We Are

JENNY PRICE

In the opening to her piece, Price writes about the Los Angeles River as "most famous for being forgotten," which is a surprising way of thinking about a place—a location that is both known and abandoned. Spend some time thinking about what Price means by this. Are there places in your own hometown (or a location in which you have spent some good deal of time) that you think of as "most famous for being forgotten"? Write an essay in which you take on a project like Price's. Think of yourself as a "nature writer" writing about a specific place. What is it you'd want your readers to know or understand about this place? What can this "forgotten" location tell us about the city or town more broadly? What issues of environmental and social justice are linked to this place? And finally, just as Price considers her own place in the city of L.A., consider your place and your position in relation both to the "forgotten" location and to its context (city, town, or countryside) more broadly.

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SEQUENCE FIVE

Experts and Expertise

Judith Butler

Edward Said

Walker Percy

Anna Tsing

Jenny Price

ALTERNATIVES:

Atul Gawande

The first two assignments in this sequence give you the chance to think about familiar settings or experiences through the work of writers who have had a significant effect on contemporary thought: Judith Butler and Edward Said.

In each case, you will be given the opportunity to work alongside these thinkers as an apprentice, carrying out work they have begun. The final assignment in the sequence will ask you to look back on what you have done, to take stock, and, with Walker Percy's account of the oppressive nature of expertise in mind, to draw some conclusions about the potential and consequences of this kind of intellectual apprenticeship. There are three alternative assignments following the sequence. Any of these could be used in place of the assignments in the sequence.

ASSIGNMENT 1

A Question for Philosophers

JUDITH BUTLER

The opening lines of Judith Butler's essay "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" might be understood as an invitation to participate with her in one of the traditions of philosophy.

What makes for a livable world is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers. It is posed in various idioms all the time by people in various walks of life. If that makes them all philosophers, then that is a conclusion I am happy to embrace. It becomes a question for ethics, I think, not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable? Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not. (p. 182)

Write an essay that takes up this invitation — and that takes it up in specific reference to what Butler has offered in “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy.” You will need, then, to take some time to represent her essay — both what it says and what it does. The “Questions for a Second Reading” (p. 200) should be helpful in preparing for this. Imagine an audience of smart people, people who may even know something about Butler, but who have not read this essay. You have read it, and you want to give them a sense of how and why you find it interesting and important.

But you’ll also need to take time to address her questions in your own terms: What makes for a livable world? What constitutes the human? Don’t slight this part of your essay. Give yourself as many pages as you gave Butler. You should, however, make it clear that you are writing in response to what you have read. You’ll want to indicate, both directly and indirectly, how your thoughts are shaped by, indebted to, or in response to hers.

ASSIGNMENT 2

On Representation

EDWARD SAID

In his essay “States” (p. 523), Edward Said insists on our recognizing the contemporary social, political, and historical context for intimate scenes he (and Jean Mohr) present of people going about their everyday lives. The Palestinian people are still much in the news — photographs of scenes from their lives are featured regularly in newspapers, in magazines, and on the Internet. Collect a series of these images from a particular and defined recent period of time — a week or a month, say, when the Palestinians have been in the news. Using these images, and putting them in conversation with some of the passages and images in “States,” write an essay in the manner of Said’s essay, with text and image in productive relationship. The goal of your essay should be to examine how Said’s work in “States” can speak to us (or might speak to us) today.

ASSIGNMENT 3

On Experts and Expertise

JUDITH BUTLER, EDWARD SAID, WALKER PERCY

The whole horizon of being is staked out by "them," the experts. The highest satisfaction of the sightseer (not merely the tourist but any layman seer of sights) is that his sight should be certified as genuine. The worst of this impoverishment is that there is no sense of impoverishment. (p. 441)

I refer to the general situation in which sovereignty is surrendered to a class of privileged knowers, whether these be theorists or artists. A reader may surrender sovereignty over that which has been written about, just as a consumer may surrender sovereignty over a thing which has been theorized about. The consumer is content to receive an experience just as it has been presented to him by theorists and planners. The reader may also be content to judge life by whether it has or has not been formulated by those who know and write about life. (p. 442)

— WALKER PERCY, "The Loss of the Creature"

In the last two assignments you were asked to try on other writers' ways of seeing the world. You looked at what you had read or done, and at scenes from your own life, casting your experience in the terms of others.

Walker Percy, in "The Loss of the Creature," offers what might be taken as a critique of such activity. "A reader," he says, "may surrender sovereignty over that which has been written about, just as a consumer may surrender sovereignty over a thing which has been theorized about." (p. 442). Judith Butler and Edward Said have been presented to you as, in a sense, "privileged knowers." You have been asked to model your own work on their examples.

It seems safe to say that, at least so far as Percy is concerned, surrendering sovereignty is not a good thing to do. If Percy were to read over your work in these assignments, how do you think he would describe what you have done? If he were to take your work as an example in his essay, where might he place it? And how would his reading of your work fit with your sense of what you have done? Would Percy's assessment be accurate, or is there something he would be missing, something he would fail to see?

Write an essay in which you describe and comment on your work in this sequence, looking at it both from Percy's point of view and from your own, but viewing that work as an example of an educational practice, a way of reading (and writing) that may or may not have benefits for the reader.

Note: You will need to review carefully those earlier papers and mark sections that you feel might serve as interesting examples in your discussion. You want to base your conclusions on the best evidence you can. When you begin writing, it might be useful to refer to the writer of those earlier papers as a "he" or

a “she” who played certain roles and performed his or her work in certain characteristic ways. You can save the first person, the “I,” for the person who is writing this assignment and looking back on those texts.

ASSIGNMENT 4

Becoming an Expert in Tsing’s World

ANNA TSING

At a key point in the opening chapter, Anna Tsing speaks directly to her readers, and she says:

I hope at this point you are saying, “This is hardly news! I can think of plenty of similar examples from the landscape and people around me.” I agree; contaminated diversity is everywhere. If such stories are so widespread and so well known, the question becomes: Why don’t we use these stories in how we know the world?” (p. 585)

This is both an invitation and a challenge. Informed by Tsing’s writing, what examples can you bring to this discussion? Make a list of three examples taken from your knowledge and experience. Talk about them with friends and classmates. And choose one as the basis of an essay where you write, in Tsing’s terms, about “contaminated diversity.” And, in the end, after you have written about the example you have chosen, return for two or three paragraphs to Tsing. What conclusions does she draw? She says, for instance, that stories of contaminated diversity can be “complicated, often ugly, and humbling.”

But this is your essay, and you should have the final word. In a final paragraph, take center stage and speak out to your readers. Where do you find yourself in relation to what she says? What seems finally to be still beyond you — beyond your comprehension or your beliefs?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Who is an expert?

JENNY PRICE

One way to view and understand a piece of writing is to think about what you might describe as a writer’s area of expertise. For example, Price refers to herself as a “nature writer.” She spends a good deal of time in her essay detailing things you are likely *not* to know. In this way, most writers could be seen as having expertise that allow them to convince us or move us in a particular direction or in a specific way. Write an essay in which you consider the question of expertise in Price’s essay. What is Price an expert in? What seems explicit about this expertise?

What things do you think she could also be consider an “expert” in that are less explicit? Once you’ve detailed how you understand the role expertise plays in Price’s essay, spend some time thinking more broadly about expertise and writing. What, for you as a writer, is the relationship between expertise and writing? How does Price’s essay (or your own experience as a writer) trouble the notion that writers are experts? How does this help you think about your own goals and moves as a writer?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

A Slow Pedagogy

ATUL GAWANDE

Atul Gawande’s “Slow Ideas” (p. 325) can be thought of as a teaching tool. Gawande has things for us to learn about innovation and change in medical practices. He also has things for us to learn about the teaching and learning that made innovation and successful change possible in life-and-death situations. This assignment invites you to write about Gawande’s arguments for best practices in teaching for innovation and change and to situate those practices in the conditions for learning that you might call necessary or at least helpful to the success of the teaching.

When you reread “Slow Ideas,” mark the moments when Gawande seems to be drawing lessons about best teaching practices from his case examples. It might be that the teaching practices are specific to the cases, or it might be that he’s making larger claims about what’s effective for teaching others. You’ll have to decide how to situate his claims for best teaching practices, but you should at the least situate them in the conditions that seem to be necessary for learning to occur. What is it, in other words, about learners and their situations that has to be present for the best teaching practices to take hold?

Write an essay in which you make a case for what you think Gawande is saying about the best teaching practices for supporting others to innovate and change. Work closely from Gawande’s case examples and situate your thinking in the conditions for learning that seem to be necessary for the best practices to work, to take hold.

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SEQUENCE SIX

Listening in Our Present

Aubrey Hirsch

Scaachi Koul

Jeff Chang

Layli Long Soldier

Most of the texts we have selected for this book are, in many ways, timeless. Whether the text was written in the 1970s or written last year, these readings have the power to shed light on the current moment we are living in.

Read two or three of the essays in this sequence again, thinking specifically about how they illuminate the moment you are living in right now. What, for example, in the past year of news seems connected to these readings? How do the readings help you “listen” to others *and* listen to the world around you? What do these readings perhaps reveal about the particular time that you are living in that perhaps you had not seen in quite that way before?

ASSIGNMENT 1

Thinking about Rape Culture

AUBREY HIRSCH

Hirsch’s “Fragments” (p. 387) is from a larger essay collection, edited by another of the authors in our anthology, Roxane Gay. The essay collection is entitled *Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture*. For this assignment, we invite you to think about “rape culture”—what it means and how it functions in society as you understand it. You should begin with Hirsch’s essay: how does she understand rape culture? You might then move to the Internet to do some of your own reading. How is the term used in media and news? Write an essay in which you detail for your readers a thorough understanding of “rape culture” by turning to Hirsch’s essay, in addition to other sources.

Your essay should reflect your intellectual and political understanding of the term, but you should also consider your own perspectives. Where do you see demonstrations of rape culture in your own consumption of popular media or in your own experiences of the world? What do you think can be done to convince skeptics that rape culture exists and that there are things they should do about it? This collection remains a bestseller; why do you suppose this collection was necessary and why has it continued to resonate?

ASSIGNMENT 2

Writing about Difficult Subjects

AUBREY HIRSCH, SCAACHI KOUL

Both Scaachi Koul (p. 415) and Aubrey Hirsch (p. 386) confront the issue of rape culture in different ways. Reread both essays, noting for yourself the moments where each writer attempts to define and describe rape culture in America. Write an essay in which you discuss both writers' approach to the subject. In what ways do they appear to approach the subject differently? One way to think about that question is to think about what you might describe as each writer's method or way of seeing. In what ways do the forms and styles of their work seem to differ or align?

In this essay, we are not asking you to draw any conclusions about which essay *is* better or which one you like better. We are inviting you to think about each writers' choices in their writing. You'll want to cite specific passages from the readings to illustrate which moments you think demonstrate the approaches you describe. And finally, you'll want to discuss how these approaches might help Koul and Hirsch write about a very difficult subject.

ASSIGNMENT 3

What It Means to Listen

SCAACHI KOUL

In an interview in *Room Magazine*, Koul says

In terms of moving forward and having a more nuanced understanding of the country, in terms of race or gender, I don't know how to fix that beyond getting white people to pay attention to me and pay attention to what other people of colour say. It's not something that I can control at this point, it's a matter of white people listening to what everybody else is saying to them. If you're a white person and you live in Canada, and you're not paying attention to what Indigenous people are telling you about their lives and experiences and history, then I'm not sure how to help you, because that feels like the most basic place to start.

In this quotation, Koul offers us a fruitful way to think about identity and about reading itself. Koul talks about “listening” and the urgent need for those whose identities come with privilege to listen to those who have been historically marginalized. We might further generalize this idea to say that it is an urgent matter in our world today that all of us are able to listen to those who we think are “different” from us (whoever “us” might be to your mind). For this assignment, we invite you to do some research on the writers in this anthology — either by reading the headnotes or by doing your own research at the library and/or the Internet. Choose a writer who seems “different” from you in some way. Read their essay in the collection carefully. Keep Koul’s quote about listening in your mind as you read. Write an essay in which you consider: What does Koul mean in terms of the significance of listening? What do you notice about yourself as a listener? At what moments in the text you have chosen, written by someone who is “different” from you in some way, do you find yourself listening best, or not listening well? Why? What qualities does one need to possess or moves does a reader need to make to be a “good” listener? What can we learn from listening?

ASSIGNMENT 4

Facts and Truth

JEFF CHANG

Chang writes, “What Trump understood best was how banal facts could be marshaled to unleash hysterical agency” (p. 223). There is a lot to think about in this sentence; Chang seems to be raising a complex point about a particular political and cultural moment. Write an essay in which you consider the significance of this quote. You might begin by providing your readers with a very close reading of the sentence — paying particular attention to each word choice and its meaning. As you interpret its meaning, consider both the quotation’s immediate context within the essay, as well as the broader cultural context Chang evokes. What, after all, does Chang mean when he says this? What examples can you point to in order to illustrate Chang’s point?

Once you have unpacked the meaning of Chang’s assertion, move to your own examples. Where else have you seen “banal facts” used to “unleash” a kind of hysteria? What, for you, is the meaning of the word “fact” and how can an understanding of that word help us to think about the current moment in American culture and politics? What ways of thinking or educating would build a world where “banal facts” could not be used in this way? What would a reader/listener/viewer need to do or know in order to make sure a banal fact could not unleash them into hysterical agency?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Everything Is in the Language

LAYLI LONG SOLDIER

Long Soldier's "38" (p. 425) is about a disturbing historical event. Long Soldier's poem is also, in many ways, about language itself — how we use it, how it shapes and reflects our understanding of the world. She even comments, repeatedly, about how she herself is using language or understanding the use of language in her own poem. For example, in the opening lines Long Soldier comments on "sentences" as a way of calling our attention to both what she is doing and to the language conventions of the sentence. Reread Long Soldier's poem looking for moments you would characterize as focused on language, both how we use it, and how it shapes and reflects our understandings.

Write an essay in which you consider Long Soldier's attention to and focus on language — her assertion that "Everything is in the language we use." If you were understand to her poem as a kind of theory about language, what would you name that theory? How would you describe her arguments and ideas about language? And why do you think language is such a major part of her work as she considers the Dakota 38? How does an understanding of or a focus on particular language help us to understand this history? Why is it important which words we use to talk about which things? What do you suppose Long Soldier hopes we will come to see about how language plays (and continues to play) a role in oppression and violence?

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SEQUENCE SEVEN

Examinations of Race and Racism

Ta-Nehisi Coates
Kwame Anthony Appiah
John Edgar Wideman
W. E. B. Du Bois
Gloria Bird
Jeff Chang
Claudia Rankine
Layli Long Soldier
June Jordan

ALTERNATIVES:

Ruth Behar
Gloria Anzaldúa

Ta-Nehisi Coates, in *Between the World and Me*, writes to his son:

I am writing to you because this was the year you saw Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes; because you know now that Renisha McBride was shot for seeking help; that John Crawford was shot down for browsing in a department store. And you have seen men in uniform drive by and murder Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old child whom they were oath-bound to protect. And you have seen

men in the same uniforms pummel Marlene Pinnock, someone's grandmother, on the side of the road. And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. (pp. 243–44)

Coates's words are perhaps the best introduction to the urgency of this sequence. In our current national climate, it is important that we think critically and self-reflexively about our responsibility to become writers who can write about (and therefore discuss and critically think about) race and racism in the United States.

In working on the kind of assignments that appear in this sequence, we ask you to think about the past as the current counterpart of the present. It can be tempting, in reading texts like Du Bois's, for example, to talk about the past *as the past* rather than thinking about the ways the past not only leads up to our present moment but also is an integral measure of the present itself. The assignments in this sequence ask you to think about the reciprocal relationship between the past and the present alongside complex and urgent questions about representation, community, identity, and oppression.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Racial Identity and Perspective

TA-NEHISI COATES, KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

As Kwame Anthony Appiah prepares for the final section of his essay "Racial Identities," he offers a surprising list to counter what he refers to as the "imperialism of identity":

In policing this imperialism of identity — an imperialism as visible in racial identities as anywhere else — it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, or Confucian but that we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; amateurs of grunge rock and lovers of Wagner; movie buffs; MTV-holics; mystery-readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet-lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. Racial identity can be the basis of resistance to racism; but even as we struggle against racism — and though we have made great progress, we have further still to go — let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies. (p. 58)

Ta-Nehisi Coates also raises questions about racial identity, although in a different register and defined in terms of a different dramatic encounter. If Appiah were to select a passage from Coates's "Between the World and Me" (p. 242) to bring into

his essay, what might it be? If the speaker in "Between the World and Me" were to speak to his son about Appiah's essay, perhaps reciting a passage, what might it be?

Write an essay in which you consider Appiah's argument from the point of view of Coates, the father, speaking to his son.

ASSIGNMENT 2

Representing Communities

TA-NEHISI COATES, JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

Both John Edgar Wideman in "Our Time" (p. 603) and Ta-Nehisi Coates in "Between the World and Me" (p. 242) can be seen as writing to understand the places in which they grew up and the ideas about the world and family that circulated in those places at those times. Wideman takes on this work by writing *about* his brother (sometimes in the voice of his brother), while Coates takes on this work by writing *to* his son. Write an essay in which you consider the following questions: What ideas, arguments, or approaches do Wideman and Coates have in common, despite the more than thirty years between publication of their books? What do their commonalities suggest to you? How does Wideman's writing about his brother make his writing different from Coates's writing, in which Coates is talking to his son? How might Coates's perspective address Wideman's concerns about getting to the truth of his brother's story?

ASSIGNMENT 3

History and the Present Moment

W. E. B. DU BOIS, TA-NEHISI COATES, KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

W. E. B. Du Bois writes about the formation of young African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He writes about the conditions of living and about the possibilities for schooling. In our own time, both Ta-Nehisi Coates, in "Between the World and Me" (p. 242), and Kwame Anthony Appiah, in "Racial Identities" (p. 38), write about similar subjects an entire century later.

Choose one of these two essays to place in conversation with the selection from Du Bois's book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Reread the selections, paying particular attention to how the writers draw upon their own experience and observations, how they address their audience (or audiences), and how they understand the limits and potential of racial identity (and racial identification).

Write an essay in which you think about the similarities across time and place and circumstance. What seems constant? necessary? inevitable? But also be sure to think about differences: What has changed across time? What is

particular to these two writers' arguments, observations, and conclusions? How do they differ? And why, do you suppose? Finally, where are you in this conversation? How might you locate yourself in relation to the arguments you've studied so closely?

ASSIGNMENT 4

Understanding Experience

KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH, JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

Both John Edgar Wideman's "Our Time" (p. 603) and Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities" (p. 38) call attention to the difficulties of representing and understanding the experience of those whom we call "African Americans"—the difficulty of telling their story, of getting it right, of recovering experience from the representations of others.

Write an essay in which you represent these two texts as examples of writers working on a problem that has a particular urgency for all Americans, not just black Americans. How might you name this problem? What do you find compelling in each of these approaches to the problem? And what might this problem have to do with you—as a writer, a thinker, a person, and a citizen?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Colonialism and Racism

GLORIA BIRD

One of Bird's central terms in "Autobiography as Spectacle" (p. 168) is *colonialism*. What do you know about this term? You might want to do some research about the term itself and how it is used and circulated. What histories or current events is Bird drawing to our attention by using this term, which appears both in her essay and in the epigraph to the essay?

Write an essay in which you explain to another person how Bird's essay relates to colonialism. You might start by helping your reader understand what colonialism means, what Bird's essay is about, and how these two elements are related. Then, in your essay itself, you'll want to explain the relationship between colonialism and autobiography, and between colonialism and representations of Native Americans.

You might end by explaining to this imagined person how this discussion is relevant to some current events that might be happening around you right now. Why is the term *colonialism* significant? And how does thinking about this concept further our thinking about social justice, identity, or history?

ASSIGNMENT 6

Defining Diversity

JEFF CHANG

As noted in the first “Questions for a Second Reading” (p. 235), Chang spends a good deal of time discussing the role of diversity in higher education. He focuses on the example at the University of Wisconsin where the image of Diallo Shabazz was digitally placed in admissions materials showing him at a football game he never attended. Chang uses this example to illustrate the ways that diversity is understood, communicated, discussed, and represented by universities and the culture at large. In this assignment, we invite you to consider some of Chang’s questions through an examination of a particular school’s discussion and representation of diversity in their admissions pages and other recruitment materials. First you will want to choose a school—it might be your own or one far from where you are now. Then you will want to choose three or four significant moments from these materials: quotes from the texts you find, particular images, or perhaps even the lack of particular language or images.

Write an essay in which you consider the questions Chang raises through an examination of a school’s recruitment, admissions, and public profile materials. What kinds of representations of diversity do you find? Who do these representations seem to be for? How can you tell? How might you use Chang’s essay as a lens through which to analyze this material? What would Chang say about it? How do you know that is what he would say? And, finally, how does Chang’s essay (if it does) cause you to think of the materials differently than you might have before reading Chang?

ASSIGNMENT 7

Raising the Important Questions
about Race

CLAUDIA RANKINE

One way to read Claudia Rankine’s “Citizen” (p. 501) is to read her narratives as asking central questions or posing central arguments about race and racism in America. Consider a few of the other texts in this sequence that could be read the same way, as raising the similar kinds of questions and arguments. The writers of these texts might approach the problem of racism differently or through different stylistic lenses, but they are also concerned with some of the same questions and arguments as Rankine.

Write an essay in which you point out what you believe to be several of Rankine’s most pressing questions about race and racism. Quote specific passages from her essay to illustrate why you believe these questions are important to Rankine. Then, consider one (or several) of the other texts in this sequence. Which

of these texts seems to address these most pressing questions as well? How do these other writers help you tell the story of Rankine's poetry and prose? Which passages do you think Rankine would want you to pay attention to from these other essays? How do these other passages extend, complicate, or demonstrate Rankine's central questions around issues of race and racism?

ASSIGNMENT 8

Connections Between Form and Content

LAYLI LONG SOLDIER, JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

In the first "Questions for a Second Reading" (p. 433) we call your attention to the ways that Long Soldier comments in the poem itself on whether her work is, indeed, a poem. There are other moments like this in the piece where Long Soldier calls attention to herself as a writer who makes decisions about the act of writing itself. It's a kind of "meta" move whereby a writer explicitly comments on the decisions, challenges, and moves they are making *as they are making them*. In "Our Time" (p. 603), John Edgar Wideman employs a similar tactic, stepping out of his essay about his brother to talk about how he struggled, as a brother and a writer, to write the piece.

Consider the ways each of these writers exposes themselves as the writer of their pieces as they are writing. Write an essay in which you discuss this writerly decision. You might begin with several passages from each essay that reveal a moment of metacommentary on the process of writing. Discuss these passages and what their impact is on you as a reader. Once you have a sense of how and when each of these writers makes these moves, we invite you to explore several questions: In reading these pieces side by side, why does it seem each of these writers chooses to provide this kind of commentary? What about their content might encourage them to do so? How do you think each writer is hoping their readers will respond? Why didn't they remove the moments of revision, doubt, or "inner dialogue" (as Long Soldier calls it)? What can you, as a writer, learn from this insistence on exposing their process?

ASSIGNMENT 9

Racism Then and Now

JUNE JORDAN

In the second "Questions for a Second Reading," (p. 412) we remind you that Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You" (p. 399) was published in 1985 and ask you to think about how the essay reflects realities in our world today, over thirty years later. Often when we think about history, we imagine it as a progression; we hope we are, as a nation or society, making "progress." As you think about the relevance of Jordan's essay to issues facing us today, what do you make of our

"progress" when it comes to race and racism? How does the date of Jordan's essay encourage, discourage, or complicate your own hopes or ideals about race? Write an essay in which you consider these questions, and make a kind of argument that might answer this broader question: how far has American culture actually come in thinking about race and racism since 1985?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Self-Implication and Viewpoint

GLORIA BIRD, RUTH BEHAR

Bird writes of her son that he "came home from school with homework in social studies in which one of his questions required his answering that *wampum belts* = *money*. Commodification of Native systems of documenting agreements is a gross misinterpretation" (pp. 170–71).

Bird may be pointing out that Euro-American "readers" see Native American traditions and communities through the lens of their own understanding of the world—thus, the Euro-American lens fails to see or understand at all.

Ruth Behar, in "The Vulnerable Observer" (p. 109), also has some interesting ideas about this question of who is looking at whom, and what they see. What do you imagine Behar might say about Bird's essay? How might Behar extend, complicate, or understand Bird's questions and claims? How do these two writers together offer a way of understanding what it means to see others, to talk about others, and to represent others? And, finally, how do these two writers together offer a way of understanding what it means to see ourselves as well?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Race and Language

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa says, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice" (p. 27). Anzaldúa speaks about "having her voice," not a single, "authentic" voice, but one she names in these terms: Indian, Spanish, white; woman, lesbian, poet. What is "voice" as defined by this chapter? Where does it come from? What does it have to do with the act of writing or the writer?

As you reread this chapter, mark those passages that you think best represent Anzaldúa's voices. Using these passages as examples, write an essay in which you discuss how these voices are different—both different from one another and different from a "standard" voice (as a "standard" voice is imagined by Anzaldúa). What do these voices represent? How do they figure in your reading? in her writing?

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SEQUENCE EIGHT

On Difficulty

Michel Foucault

Judith Butler

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Scaachi Koul

Aubrey Hirsch

Claudia Rankine

ALTERNATIVES:

Alison Bechdel

John Edgar Wideman

The assignments in this sequence invite you to consider the nature of difficult texts and how the problems they pose might be said to belong simultaneously to language, to readers, and to writers. The sequence presents six difficult essays (and two alternatives, should you wish to alter the sequence). The assumption the sequence makes is that they are difficult for all readers, not just for students, and that the difficulty is necessary, strategic, and not a mistake or evidence of a writer's failure.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Foucault's Fabrication

MICHEL FOUCAULT

About three-quarters of the way into his chapter "Panopticism," Michel Foucault says,

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great

abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. (p. 310)

This prose is eloquent and insists on its importance to our moment and our society; it is also very hard to read or to paraphrase. Who is doing what to whom? How do we think about the individual's being carefully fabricated in the social order?

Take this chapter as a problem to solve. What is it about? What are its key arguments? its examples and conclusions? Write an essay that summarizes "Pan-opticism." Imagine that you are writing for readers who have read the chapter (although they won't have the pages in front of them). You will need to take time to present and discuss examples from the text. Your job is to help your readers figure out what it says. You get the chance to take the lead and be the teacher. You should feel free to acknowledge that you don't understand certain sections even as you write about them.

So, how do you write about something you don't completely understand? Here's a suggestion: when you have completed your summary, read it over and treat it as a draft. Ask questions like these: What have I left out? What was I tempted to ignore or finesse? Go back to those sections of the chapter that you ignored and bring them into your essay. Revise by adding discussions of some of the very sections you don't understand. You can write about what you think Foucault *might* be saying—you can, that is, be cautious and tentative; you can admit that the text is what it is, hard to read. You don't have to master this text. You do, however, need to see what you can make of it.

ASSIGNMENT 2

Concept and Example

JUDITH BUTLER

Judith Butler's "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" (p. 182) is a philosophical essay, and one of the difficulties it presents to a reader is its emphasis on conceptual language. The sentences most often refer to concepts or ideas rather than to people, places, or events in the concrete, tangible, observable world. It refers to the *human* or to the *body*, but without telling the stories of particular humans or particular bodies. In fact, as a reader, you can feel her pull back at the very moments when she begins to speak in the first person, to personalize the essay. Without something concrete, without some situation or context in which the conceptual can take shape, these conceptual terms can lose their force or meaning. (If there is a story in this essay, it is not the story of the loss of a particular friend or love; it is the "story" of a struggle to understand and to

articulate a response to the essay's opening question: what makes for a livable world?)

Reread this essay, noting particular moments (sentences, passages, and paragraphs) that make things hard for you, that are difficult for you as a reader. Choose four that seem to you to be the most representative. How are they hard? How would you characterize the difficulties they present? Where and how do you see Butler trying to help her readers? Where and how does she leave you on your own?

As an exercise, prepare a brief paraphrase or translation of each of these four representative moments: "What I think Butler is saying is . . ." And, finally, write an essay in which you discuss the essay, its argument, its methods, and the difficulties it presents to a reader.

ASSIGNMENT 3

A Reader-Friendly Text

KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

Compared to Judith Butler's "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy" (p. 182), Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Racial Identities" (p. 38) is a reader-friendly text. But it is also a learned text. It contains casual references to writers and scholars whom you may not recognize: W. E. B. Du Bois, Ian Hacking, Matthew Arnold, Charles Taylor, Thomas Sowell—to list just a few. The essay works with complicated ideas and poses an argument that not only runs against common assumptions, but also raises difficult political questions about race and identity.

As you reread, take note of the places in the text where the writer addresses you or, even if not using direct address, seems to have you in mind. And take note of those places where you find yourself to be most challenged, where the text becomes difficult to read.

When you are done, go back over your notes to see if there are distinct strategies, to see if your examples cluster into types. Then write an essay in which you discuss "Racial Identities," its argument, its methods, and the difficulties it presents to a reader. If it is helpful, you might draw on passages from Foucault or Butler for additional examples.

ASSIGNMENT 4

A Theory of Difficulty

MICHEL FOUCAULT, JUDITH BUTLER, KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

Now that you have worked with these three texts, you are in a good position to review what you have written about each of them in order to say something more general about difficulty—difficulty in writing, difficulty in reading.

Write an essay in which you present a theory of difficulty, a kind of guide, something that might be useful to students who are regularly asked to confront difficult assignments. You will want to work from your previous essays—pulling out sections, revising, reworking examples for this new essay. Don't let your earlier work go unacknowledged. But, at the same time, feel free to move out from these readings to other materials, examples, or situations.

ASSIGNMENT 5

What Does Difficulty Mean?

SCAACHI KOUL AND AUBREY HIRSCH

As we note in the "Introduction," many of the essays in this collection take on difficult subject matter that can be hard to read about, confront, or even articulate to begin with. One might even say that every essay in this reader is "difficult" in some way, in its subject matter, theoretical approach, language, and form. Difficulty is not merely a matter of dense language or accessibility in a piece of writing. Difficulty is also the condition of a writer's challenge: to represent through language what seems difficult to articulate or represent. Another way to think of this is to think about the ways our culture encourages us *not* to think about difficult subjects—or even to simplify them rather than represent them in their complexity.

As you reread Koul's "Hunting Season" (p. 417) and Hirsch's "Fragments" (p. 387), note your own reading responses. At what moments was the essay "difficult" to read? What do you think made it difficult to read? We invite you to consider features of the text itself *and* characteristics of your own dispositions as a reader and human being that might make certain moments more or less difficult to read.

Then, consider another essay or two in this collection that has given you difficulty. Write an essay in which you consider the question: what makes a text difficult to read? You can explore this question as one of subject matter, of density, or of form. Or all of those. This is a moment for you to define: What do you mean by difficulty? How have you experienced difficulty as a reader? And what can you learn from your own experiences of difficulty?

If you have written about this question before, how has reading Koul and Hirsch's essays changed or complicated your concept of difficulty?

ASSIGNMENT 6

Identity and Difficulty

CLAUDIA RANKINE

In our "Introduction," we write the following:

But there is another kind of difficulty teachers and students alike will face in encountering the readings we've curated here. This difficulty

stems from coming into contact with perspectives and descriptions of the world that you find difficult to hear. Perhaps because your own identity and perspective is either very distant or very close to the ones taken up in a given reading. Or perhaps because it is often difficult to acknowledge and take account of what is urgently and gravely wrong in our current cultural and political moment. The essays here challenge us to *be* writers — which means, in a fundamental sense, to be willing to look carefully, closely, and unrelentingly both at the world as you imagine it to be and at the world as it is for those who are *not* you. In this spirit, we invite you to develop and nurture new ways of reading for yourself, new ways of listening when someone else (for example, an author of one of the essays in this book) is speaking. We believe this will not only make you a better reader and writer, but that it will also make you a more attentive and precise thinker in your life at large — both your academic life *and* your personal/social/professional life as you move through and leave your college experience. (p. 2)

In this assignment, we invite you to consider again this idea of “the world as you imagine it to be and the world as it is for those who are *not* you.” You might begin by describing what you think we mean in the above passage and how that might connect to your own reading of Rankine’s “Citizen” (p. 501). Where do you see yourself or your world in Rankine’s essay? What experiences do you bring to your reading of the text; in other words, how does your own identity and experience shape the way you understand Rankine’s work? Along these lines, we’d like you to consider other essays in this collection that might be “difficult” for you to read. These can be essays you have already explored through your writing course, but they can also be essays that are new to you. Read through the introductions and first pages of essays that stand out to you to discover one or two other essays that seem “difficult.” Write an essay in which you consider your experience with Rankine’s work and connect that experience to another essay in the collection: What does it mean for a text to be difficult? How can you tell it will (or is) difficult for you? How does the writer anticipate (or not) your difficulty? And what strategies as a reader can you use to intellectually and emotionally cope with this kind of difficulty?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

The Graphic Challenge

ALISON BECHDEL

Some readers might find Alison Bechdel’s work difficult to read. Many of us (except for those who might be avid comic book readers) might not be accustomed to reading graphic essays or graphic novels. Because Bechdel’s work requires us to perhaps enact a new way of reading a text or thinking about a text, some difficulty or discomfort might arise as we are reading it. As you read “The

Ordinary Devoted Mother" (p. 69), think carefully about what the form of her graphic work asks of you. What challenges present themselves as you read Bechdel's work? What difficulties does the graphic excerpt present? And how, as readers, might we adapt, adjust, and learn to be better readers of graphic work? Write an essay that describes the difficulties you faced while reading Bechdel. You'll want to consider the following questions: What about *your* reading strategies makes Bechdel's text difficult for you to read? How might Bechdel's work teach you how to read it? What new strategies might you invent to rise to the graphic challenge?

If you find, however, that Bechdel's piece seems *less* difficult for you to read than other texts in this sequence, you may instead compose an essay in which you describe the methods of reading you use that might make you more prepared to read a piece like Bechdel's. What about your strategies or practices of reading makes this text *less* difficult than others you have been reading in this sequence?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

A Story of Reading

JOHN EDGAR WIDEMAN

At several points in "Our Time" (p. 603), John Edgar Wideman interrupts the narrative to discuss his position as a writer telling Robby's story. He describes the problems he faces in writing this piece (or in reading the text of his brother's life). You could read this selection, in other words, as an essay about reading and writing. It is Wideman's account of his work.

As a narrative, "Our Time" is made up of sections, fragments, different voices. It is left to the reader, in a sense, to put the pieces together and complete the story. There is work for a reader to do, in other words, and one way to account for that work is to call it "practice" or "training." Wideman wants to force a reader's attention by offering a text that makes unusual demands, a text that teaches a reader to read differently. If you think of your experience with the text, of how you negotiated its terrain, what is the story of reading you might tell? In what way do your difficulties parallel Wideman's—at least those he tells us about when he stops to talk about the problems he faces as a writer?

Write an essay in which you tell the story of what it was like to read "Our Time" and compare your experience working with this text with Wideman's account of his own.

A story of reading—this is not a usual school exercise. Usually you are asked what texts mean, not what it was like to read them. As you prepare for this assignment, think back as closely as you can to your experience the first time through. And you will want to reread, looking for how and where Wideman seems to be deliberately working on his reader, defying expectation and directing response. You want to tell a story that is rich in detail, precise in accounting

for moments in the text. You want to bring forward the features that can make your story a good story to read — suspense, action, context, drama. Since this is your story, you are one of the characters. You will want to refer to yourself as you were at the moment of reading while also reserving a space for you to speak from your present position, as a person thinking about what it was like to read the text, and as a person thinking about Wideman and about reading. You are telling a story, but you will need to break the narrative (as Wideman breaks his) to account in more general terms for the demands Wideman makes on readers. What habits does he assume a reader will bring to this text? How and why does he want to break them?

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SEQUENCE NINE

The Art of Argument

Alison Bechdel

Edward Said

Joy Castro

Atul Gawande

Jennine Capó Crucet

Solmaz Sharif

Writing courses have traditionally included a unit on argumentation. The assignments in this sequence ask you to consider arguments in unusual settings. The assignments ask you not only to identify and explore writers' arguments but also to explore how they are enacted. You don't need technical terms for these assignments (like *induction* and *deduction*); you will be asked to develop your own terms, your own ways of describing the arguments you find.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Engaging Visual Pathways

ALISON BECHDEL, EDWARD SAID

Although Alison Bechdel is exclusively a cartoonist, you might consider her alongside some of the other authors in this book who pair their textual writing with images. Edward Said, in "States" (p. 523), makes use of images as he composes his individual writing project. Although his text differs from Bechdel's piece in many ways, both of them try to engage both visual and textual pathways in order to enact their various lines of inquiry.

Write an essay in which you try to describe the multiple ways in which these authors utilize images. How do photographs of bodies or places affect

you in comparison to Bechdel's drawings in "The Ordinary Devoted Mother" (p. 69)? How exactly does each of these writers work with images, and what are the purposes of those images? What would it be like if Bechdel offered actual photographs of her family instead of cartoons? How might such a change affect our reading of the piece? Conversely, what if Said's essay was reimagined as a graphic novel? Another way to think about this topic is to pose the question: do images convey a kind of argument in the way writing does? If they do convey an argument, how might you describe that process to other readers?

ASSIGNMENT 2

Story as Argument

JOY CASTRO

One way to read Castro's pieces "Hungry" and "On Becoming Educated" (pp. 207, 210) is to see them as narrative, as two short essays that tell the stories of Castro's journey as a student and her education. But another way to understand Castro's writing is to imagine these essays as making an argument (or several arguments) about many different things: education, race, class, higher education, social justice, gender, and any other subjects you might have thought of while you considered the fourth "Question for a Second Reading" (p. 216).

Write an essay in which you make an argument about what the most urgent argument of Castro's essays seems to be. Of course, she makes more than one argument. But for the essay you will write, try to prioritize. What is her central argument? Or which of her arguments are most central to you? Why? How can you tell? What passages would you point to in order to support your own argument about what is most important in Castro's work? What is Castro's work *really* about in these selections?

ASSIGNMENT 3

Best Practices

ATUL GAWANDE

Atul Gawande's "Slow Ideas" (p. 325) can be thought of as a teaching tool. Gawande has things for us to learn about innovation and change in medical practices. He also has things for us to learn about the teaching and learning that made innovation and successful change possible in life-and-death situations. This assignment invites you to write about Gawande's arguments for best practices in teaching for innovation and change and to situate those practices in the conditions for learning that you might call necessary or at least helpful to the success of the teaching.

When you reread “Slow Ideas,” mark the moments when Gawande seems to be drawing lessons about best teaching practices from his case examples. It might be that the teaching practices are specific to the cases, or it might be that he’s making larger claims about what’s effective for teaching others. You’ll have to decide how to situate his claims for best teaching practices, but you should at least situate them in the conditions that seem to be necessary for learning to occur. What is it, in other words, about learners and their situations that has to be present for the best teaching practices to take hold?

Write an essay in which you make a case for what you think Gawande is saying about the best teaching practices for supporting others to innovate and change. Work closely from Gawande’s case examples and situate your thinking in the conditions for learning that seem to be necessary for the best practices to work, to take hold.

ASSIGNMENT 4

Narrative as Argument

JENNINE CAPÓ CRUCET

Most readers might experience Crucet’s “Going Cowboy” (p. 258) as narrative, as a personal story about a personal experience she had in exploring a new place for the first time. But the piece is, of course, about much more than that. In fact, we might also read the essay as making several important arguments (some more explicit than others) about issues of gender, race, politics, and history. For this essay, we want you to decide what you think is Crucet’s most important argument in this piece. Write an essay in which you identify (using specific moments in the text) Crucet’s most poignant or essential argument. What is she trying to persuade us about? How does she enact that persuasion? Why might Crucet have chosen the narrative essay to communicate this argument as opposed to a more conventional and linear persuasive essay? What about Crucet’s storytelling style and craft make the argument powerful, visible, and interesting? Or, in the case where you think the argument is more implicit, how might you help a reader to see its power in the essay?

ASSIGNMENT 5

Poetry as Argument

SOLMAZ SHARIF

We don’t always think about poetry as making arguments, but, as an experiment, think about the ways that Sharif’s work in this excerpt from *Look* (p. 565) might be said to make an argument. Identify four or five passages or lines from Sharif’s

work that seem significant to you in terms of what you think Sharif's central argument might be.

Write an essay in which you consider the question: what is Sharif's central argument in these poems? Imagine a reader who is not familiar with Sharif or her work; describe the ways her poems function as arguments. How can a reader tell what the most essential point of her argument is? What does it mean to make arguments through poetry? How might that differ from making an argument through more direct or more conventional form? Finally, consider the impact of Sharif's argument on you as a reader. Is she convincing to you? What does she seem to want you to think about, question, or consider more carefully? And why might she want you to do that? And what might you gain from doing so?

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SEQUENCE TEN

Beyond the Essay

Aubrey Hirsch

Jenny Price

Roxane Gay

Edward Said

ALTERNATIVES:

Alison Bechdel

Susan Griffin

In this sequence, we invite you to think beyond the essay as you formally understand it. The texts we have gathered for this sequence are all working outside the bounds of what we might think of as an “essay.” The authors introduce additional elements of composition: photographs, drawings, list-making, fragments, and other unconventional approaches. Likewise, the assignments in this sequence ask you to do the same—to think creatively about the forms your writing can take and how those forms impact readers’ understanding of and engagement with your ideas. You should think of the assignments in this sequence as a series of experiments with new forms, as ways for you to express your ideas in several registers at once and making use of visual cues (either in the text itself or through images) to engage with your subject on multiple levels—and invite your own readers to do the same.

ASSIGNMENT 1

Unconventional Moves

AUBREY HIRSCH

Hirsch makes several interesting and unconventional moves in the essay that draw from formulas and fields that might seem removed from the practice of

writing, namely logic conditionals and mathematics word problems. She writes, in a list of conditions, for example, "If rape culture had a flag, it would be one of those 'boob inspector' T-shirts" (p. 387). And later, she offers her take on word problems: "Carla is editing her online dating profile. When she adds the word *cheerleader*, her message requests increase by 42 percent" (p. 391). Hirsch continues with the word problem layout and finally asks: "Assuming she goes on an average of three dates per month, how many hours will she need to spend with any given man before she feels comfortable giving him her home address?" (p. 391).

Compose your own piece of writing in which you continue one of these forms that Hirsch begins. Choose a subject that is meaningful to you, and try to convey your perspective on that subject using either a series of word problems or a list of conditionals like the ones Hirsch uses. You could also do some combination of both. This is both a creative and critical writing assignment in that you are trying to convey your argument(s) through unconventional means. Once you've written a series of these conditionals or word problems, write a postscript in which you consider the question: What did these unusual forms make possible? Why do you suppose Hirsch decides to include these in her essay? What impact did they have in your own writing?

ASSIGNMENT 2

Making a List

JENNY PRICE

Price's title, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A.," sets up the form of her essay as a numbered list in which each number corresponds with a way of seeing and also serves as a section title (for example, "One Way of Seeing Nature in L.A.: As Nonexistent," p. 477). This form also recalls Wallace Stevens's poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. Study the form of Price's essay. Reread the essay making notes about its structure, its moves, and its form. Make a list of moves and formal decisions a writer would have to make if they were going to learn to write the way that Price writes in this particular essay.

Once you have a good sense of the form and a list of five or six things you think a writer would need to do to write a piece like this one, try your hand at doing so. Begin with the title: "Thirteen Ways of Seeing _____ in _____." Your essay need not model Price's in terms of the content. Your essay can be about anything that interests you. You could focus on place like Price does (for example, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Water in Kansas") or you might choose to focus on a subject entirely unlike Price's (for example, "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Popular Music in American Culture"). Whatever you decide, you will want your essay to stylistically sound like Price's. You'll want to use the numbered list in the same way Price does. You'll want to learn (through the writing itself) what the strengths and intricacies of this kind of essay are, and what this form allows for or makes difficult.

ASSIGNMENT 3

Instruction Manual

ROXANE GAY

A significant way to learn about Gay's essay and about writing more generally, is to take on the style and form of the essay you are reading to understand for yourself as a writer what the form allows and makes possible. For this assignment, first consider the list form of Gay's work in this essay. How does she execute this form? What are some of the signature moves in the list form? How might you instruct someone else about how to "write like Roxane Gay"—or at least write like her in this particular piece.

Once you've given those questions some thought and taken some notes, design a list essay of your own. You might begin with the title "How to _____." Like Gay, you want to make a list of 13, or another number, of instructions about how to do this thing, and like Gay, you want your title to be something interesting and perhaps something one would not typically give instructions about. And like Gay, you'll want your piece to delight its readers, but you will also want your piece to encourage your readers to consider larger cultural, philosophical, or political questions about our world today. After your essay, compose a post-script in which you describe the process of writing it. What did you learn about the form? How do you measure your success in pulling off this alternative form?

ASSIGNMENT 4

The Photo Essay

EDWARD SAID

Compose a similar project, a Said-like reading of a set of photos. These can be photos prepared for the occasion (by you or a colleague); they could also be photos already available. Whatever their source, they should represent people and places, a history and/or geography that you know well, that you know to be complex and contradictory, and that you know will not be easily or readily understood by others, both the group for whom you will be writing (most usefully the members of your class) and readers more generally. You must begin with a sense that the photos cannot speak for themselves; you must speak for them.

In preparation, you should reread closely to come to a careful understanding of Said's project. (The first and second "Questions for a Second Reading" should be useful for this.) To prepare a document that is Said-like (one that shows your understanding of what Said is doing), you will need an expert's sense of how to write from and to photographs, and you will need to consider questions of form — of order, arrangement, and genre.

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Graphic Memoir

ALISON BECHDEL

Compose a piece of graphic memoir. Your piece need not be as long as Bechdel's, but you should think of yourself as imitating Bechdel, taking on her ways of composing. You can come up with your cartoon frames by either drawing them or, if you know how, constructing them digitally in whatever ways you can.

Once you've composed seven to ten frames, write an afterword in which you explore what you discovered in the process of trying to compose like Bechdel does. What was it like? How did the process reveal something to you about your own methods of composing? What did you learn from trying Bechdel's approach?

ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Multiple Threads and Fragments

SUSAN GRIFFIN

It is useful to think of Griffin's prose as experimental. She is trying to do something that she can't do in the "usual" essay form. She wants to make a different kind of argument or engage her reader in a different manner. And so she mixes personal and academic writing. She assembles fragments and puts seemingly unrelated material into surprising and suggestive relationships. She breaks the "plane" of the page with italicized intersections. She organizes her material, but not in the usual mode of thesis-example-conclusion. The arrangement is not nearly so linear. At one point, when she seems to be prepared to argue that German child-rearing practices produced the Holocaust, she quickly says:

Of course there cannot be one answer to such a monumental riddle, nor does any event in history have a single cause. Rather a field exists, like a field of gravity that is created by the movements of many bodies. Each life is influenced and it in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is a cause is also an effect. Childhood experience is just one element in the determining field. (p. 356)

Her prose serves to create a "field," one where many bodies are set in relationship.

It is useful, then, to think about Griffin's prose as the enactment of a method, as a way of doing a certain kind of intellectual work. One way to study this, to feel its effects, is to imitate it, to take it as a model. For this assignment, write a Griffin-like essay, one similar in its methods of organization and argument. You will need to think about the stories you might tell, about the stories and texts you might gather (stories and texts not your own). As you write, you will want to think carefully about arrangement and about commentary (about where, that is, you will speak to your reader as the writer of the piece). You should not feel bound to Griffin's subject matter, but you should feel that you are working in her spirit.

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